

H-Gram 058: Operation Desert Storm in January 1991; The Korean War: Chinese Third Phase Offensive in January 1951; Passing of RDML Phillip F. McNall, SC, USN (Ret.)

15 January 2021

Contents

- *30th Anniversary of Desert Storm: January 1991*
- *The Korean War: Chinese Third Phase Offensive, January 1951*
- *Passing of RDML Phillip F. McNall, SC, USN (Ret.)*



Several U.S. Navy ships lie tied up during Operation Desert Shield. The ships are, from left: the guided missile destroyer USS *Macdonough* (DDG-39), the command ship USS *La Salle* (AGF-3), the amphibious command ship USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC-19), and the combat stores ship USS *San Jose* (AFS-7). (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921-2008)

This H-Gram focuses on Operation Desert Storm in January 1991 and the Korean War: Chinese Third Phase Offensive in January 1951, as well as the passing of RDML Phillip F. McNall, SC, USN (Ret.)

30th Anniversary of Desert Storm: January 1991

For U.S. Navy Operations during Desert Shield (August 1990-January 1991) please see H-grams 052, 053, 054, 055, and 056.

*By the onset of Desert Storm hostilities on 17 January 1991, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT), commanded by Vice Admiral Stanley R. Arthur, embarked on USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC-19), included 108 U.S. Navy ships: 34*

*in the Arabian Gulf, 35 in the North Arabian Sea/Gulf of Oman, 26 in the Red Sea and 13 in the Mediterranean. These included six aircraft carriers with over 400 aircraft, two battleships, 18 cruisers, and 35 amphibious ships. About 75 Coalition warships from 14 nations included 18 British, 14 French and 10 Italian navy ships. This was the largest naval force assembled since World War II. The Coalition ships also participated in the Maritime Interception Operations, commanded by Rear Admiral William M. Fogarty (CTF-152), embarked on USS *Laalle* (AGF-3), which by that time had conducted 6,913 intercepts, 823 boardings, and 36 diversions since late August*

1990; the intercepts and boardings continued during the war (and long afterwards).

At 0130 17 January 1991 Persian Gulf time, the AEGIS cruiser San Jacinto (CG-56), operating in the Red Sea, launched the first U.S. Navy Tomahawk Land-Attack Cruise Missile (TLAM) fired in anger, with more to follow. Eleven minutes later, destroyer Paul F. Foster (DD-964) and Bunker Hill (CG-52) commenced launching from the Arabian Gulf (accounts vary as to which one launched first). Within minutes, the first salvo of 48 TLAMS (of 114 in three salvos the first night from nine ships) was enroute to targets in Iraq (these were the first of 297 TLAMs fired during the campaign). Battleships Missouri (BB-63) and Wisconsin (BB-64) also launched TLAMs in the first salvo. Two, possibly as many as six, TLAMs were shot down by Iraqi air defenses (the third wave suffered the highest percentage of non-arrivals at the target). Roughly 80 percent of TLAMs reached their target, excellent performance considering the flat elevation of most of Iraq, which was challenging for the Terrain Contour Matching (TERCOM) and terminal Digital Scene Matching Area Correlator (DSMAC) guidance of TLAMs at the time. (TLAMs would also be the only weapons to strike the Iraqi capital of Baghdad during daylight hours).

At roughly the same time as the TLAMs were launching, U.S. Army Apache helicopters began destroying Iraqi early warning radar sites along the Iraqi-Saudi Arabia border, as special operations forces penetrated deep into Iraq to assist in destroying surface-to-surface ballistic missile sites and other targets. Following close behind the TLAMs were over 1,000 U.S. and Coalition aircraft, including 30 U.S. Air Force F-117 stealth fighters and 228 Navy sorties from four of the six aircraft carriers. Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) was still racing around the Arabian Peninsula from Suez to join Battle Force Zulu (CTF 154). Commanded by Rear Admiral Daniel P. March, embarked on Midway (CV-41), CTF 154 was operating in the central Arabian Gulf and included just-arrived carrier Ranger (CV-61). Battle Force Yankee (CTF

155), commanded by RADM Riley D. Mixson, remained in the northern Red Sea with Saratoga (CV-60), John F. Kennedy (CV-67), and just-arrived America (CV-66), which did not participate for the first days due to prioritization of USAF tankers necessary to reach Iraq from the Red Sea. RADM Mixson also commanded CTG 150.9, the Mediterranean Strike Group, which included ships and a submarine launching TLAMs (eight) into Iraq several days later.

At 1900 16 January Eastern Standard Time (0300 17 January Gulf time), as airstrikes were reaching their targets in Iraq, the White House announced (followed two hours later by President George H.W. Bush on TV) that the "liberation of Kuwait has begun" under the operation code-named Desert Storm.

The first night strikes went very well as Coalition tactics saturated the Iraqi air defense system and Iraqi surface-to-air missiles went "stupid" thanks to improved Coalition (mostly U.S.) electronic warfare capability and High Speed Radiation Missiles (HARM), a weapon brought to the fight primarily by USN aircraft (see also H-Gram 056). However, the first Coalition aircraft shot down was an F/A-18 of Strike-Fighter Squadron (VFA-181), off Saratoga, flown by LCDR Michael "Scott" Speicher, probably by an Iraqi Mig-25 Foxbat in the only Iraqi air-to-air kill of USN aircraft during the war. (Speicher's remains were not found and identified until 2009).

On the night of 17-18 January, two USN A-6 Intruders were shot down. One VA-35 A-6E off Saratoga was downed by Iraqi AAA during a low-altitude strike on H-3 airfield in western Iraq (LT Robert Wetzel and LT Jeffrey Zaun were captured), and another A-6E on that strike was badly damaged and made an emergency landing in Saudi Arabia, where it was deemed unreparable. The same night an A-6E from VA-155 off Ranger was shot down during a low-altitude minelaying mission in the approaches to the Iraqi naval base

at Umm Qasr, (both LT William Costen and LT Charles Turner were killed).

During a daylight strike on 18 January, F/A-18s of VFA-81 flown by LCDR (future VADM) Mark Fox and LT Nick Mongillo each shot down an Iraqi Mig-21 Fishbed fighter with a combination of AIM-9 Sidewinder and AIM-7 Sparrow air-to-air missiles before the two F/A-18s continued with their mission and dropped bombs on Iraqi targets. (LCDR Fox and LT Mongillo would each be awarded a Silver Star). These were the only U.S. Navy air-to-air kills of fixed-wing aircraft during Desert Storm.

Despite the rapid destruction of Iraq's fixed ballistic missile launch sites, Saddam Hussein was true to his threat, and on the second night of the war Iraqi began firing ballistic missiles at targets in Israel and Saudi Arabia using mobile launchers (Over 70 ballistic missiles, generically called "scuds," were launched during the war. Not one mobile launcher was found and destroyed during the war).

Meanwhile on the night of 17-18 January, the guided missile frigate Nicholas (FFG-47), commanded by CDR (future RADM) Dennis Morral, commenced audacious operations in the Northern Arabian Gulf in company with Kuwaiti FPB-57 missile boat Istiqlal (P-5702) as the advance Search and Rescue group. (see also H-Gram 053 on Istiqlal). With two embarked Army OH-58D (AHIP) helicopters and her own HSL-44 SH-60B helicopters and embarked SEALs, Nicholas conducted the first combined helicopter and surface gunfire mission in the Northern Arabian Gulf, neutralizing nine of 11 Iraqi-occupied Kuwaiti oil platforms in the al-Dorrah oil field on the evening of 18 January (after the Iraqis fired a shoulder-launched SAM at U.S. helicopters), with the result of five Iraqis killed, three wounded, and 29 taken prisoner (including six by Istiqlal). CDR Morral would be awarded a Silver Star for this and additional operations. Nicholas was part of Surface Action Group (SAG)

Alfa, under the command of Captain William Putnam (COMDESRON 35), embarked on Leftwich (DD-984), with Curtts (FFG-38), Kuwaiti TNC-45 missile boat Al Sanbouk, and a self-propelled barge.

Also on 18 January, Marine AV-8B Harriers flew their first sea-based combat missions off Tarawa (LHA-1) and Nassau (LHA-4). The commander of the Amphibious Task Force (CTF-156) was RADM John B. LaPlante, embarked on Nassau.

By 19 January, the U.S. Navy had launched 216 TLAMs against Iraq, including the first TLAMs launched in combat from a submarine, Louisville (SSN-724), firing submerged from the Red Sea. A-6Es from John F. Kennedy launched two AGM-84E SLAM-Standoff Land Attack Missiles (developed from the Harpoon Antiship Missile) for the first time (before the weapon had even commenced formal operational testing), which were guided by A-7 Corsair II aircraft to a successful hit on their target in a heavily defended area.

On 21 January, a VF-103 F-14 off Saratoga was shot down over Iraq by a missile. (LT Devon Jones was rescued by Special Operations forces but LT Lawrence Slade was captured.) On 22 January, USN A-6s sank Iraq's T-43 minesweeper (used as a minelayer) in the channel to Umm Qasr.

On 23 January a helicopter off Nicholas rescued a downed USAF F-16 pilot. The same day, a VA-115 A-6E off Midway bombed the Iraqi supertanker Amuriyah (157,00 DWT) near the Iraqi Mina al-Bakr offshore oil terminal, which caused considerable controversy, partly due to the communications logjam.

On 24 January A-6s possibly sank Spasilac, Iraq's other primary minelayer. (British Lynx armed helos claimed to sink Spasilac on 29 January, which is actually more likely). The same day, VA-65 A-6s off Theodore Roosevelt disabled an Iraqi vessel reported as a "Yevgenya"-class minesweeper near Qurah Island (about 25 NM east of southern

Kuwait). A similar Iraqi vessel coming to the aid of the stricken vessel struck an Iraqi mine and sank (accounts vary as to the order of events). Navy and Army helos off Curts strafed the "Yevgenya" causing the Iraqis to abandon ship. After a helo destroyed a floating mine near Curts, Curts sent a whaleboat with SEALs embarked to board the Yevgenya and take anything of Intelligence value, before Curts sank the vessel with 76mm gunfire and rescued 22 Iraqis. The skipper of Curts, CDR Glenn Montgomery, was awarded a Silver Star for this and other actions during the war. In the meantime, the Army OH-58Ds flying off Curts were fired on by the Iraqi garrison on Qurah Island. The Army helos returned fire, causing the Iraqis to surrender (the two Army OH-58Ds actually landed on the island and accepted the surrender). A composite SEAL platoon from Curts, Nicholas, and Leftwich then landed on the island and took 29 more Iraqi prisoners, officially liberating the first piece of Kuwaiti territory during the war. During this operation Curts passed unknowingly through the Iraqi outer moored contact minefield, twice.

Also on 24 January, two Iraqi Mirage F-1s (with either Exocet anti-ship missiles or incendiary bombs) flew down the Kuwait and Saudi shoreline, which exploited coordination challenges between the USAF and USN Air Defense Sectors. USN ships had difficulty tracking the Mirage F-1s due to coastal interference. Although cruiser Worden (CG-18) vectored USN fighters to intercept, the E-3A AWACS opted to bring in a Saudi F-15, which downed both F-1s.

By 25 January it became apparent that four Iraqi supertankers moored at Kuwait's Mina al-Ahmadi oil refinery piers had been dumping millions of gallons of oil into the Arabian Gulf (along with open pipes from the facility and from the Iraqi Mina al-Bakr oil transshipment facility), threatening critical desalinization plants and causing an environmental disaster.

Also on 25 January, the Saudi missile boat Abu Obaidah was hit and damaged by a missile, probably a malfunctioning High Speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM) jettisoned by a USAF F-4G "Wild Weasel," which killed one Sailor and critically wounded two more. Commencing on 26 January, virtually every Iraqi aircraft that could fly fled from Iraq to Iran, about 137 by the end of the month. Due to short time of flight, the great majority made it to Iran before Coalition aircraft could react and shoot them down. Iran never gave any of the aircraft back and incorporated some into their own air force.

On 29 January, the Iraqis launched a spoiling attack across the border from Kuwait into Saudi Arabia into the coastal town of al Khafji, where they engaged Saudi troops and U.S. Marines. Although fighting was intense, the attack was beaten back with heavy losses to the Iraqis (at least 33 tanks and 28 armored personnel carriers destroyed, possibly as many as 90 armored vehicles total). The Marines suffered their first ground combat casualties, with 11 Marines killed, seven of them in a "friendly fire" incident when their light armored vehicle (LAV) was hit by a Maverick missile from a USAF A-10. A U.S. AC-130 gunship, responsible for destroying many Iraqi vehicles, was also shot down by an Iraqi shoulder-launched surface-to-air missile after it remained after daybreak responding to a Marine request for assistance; all 14 crewmen were killed.

Also on 29 January, U.S. Marines of the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit off Okinawa (LPH-3) captured Maradim Island, another Kuwaiti island occupied by the Iraqis (who had evacuated), in order to gather Intelligence on Iraqi minelaying activity, with partial success. The same day, destroyer Leftwich avoided a mine by a mere three feet.

Commencing on 30 January, the bulk of the Iraqi Navy attempted to emulate the Iraqi Air Force and flee to Iran. A few Iraqi missile boats had been picked off by that point, but most were lost in the

"Battle of Bubiyan Island" (which later accounts have called the "Bubiyan Turkey-Shoot.") In over 20 separate engagements, numerous Iraqi vessels were sunk by a gauntlet of U.S., British and Canadian aircraft, with the British Lynx helicopters with Sea Skua missiles being particularly effective. By the time it was over, all six of the Kuwait Exocet missile boats that the Iraqis captured on the opening night of the war, and almost all Iraqi OSA missile boats were destroyed. Two of three Polnocny landing ship medium (LSM) were sunk. Curts and Leftwich rescued 20 Iraqis from a sunken Polnocny. Three damaged Iraqi vessels made it to Iran; one OSA I missile boat, one Polnocny LSM, and one Bogomol large patrol boat.

By the end of January, both the Iraqi air force and navy had effectively ceased to exist. U.S. Naval Forces Central Command forces had flown over 3,500 sorties from six aircraft carriers (many flying suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD) sorties without which the USAF F-117 Stealth fighters would not go into the heavily defended area around Baghdad). Over 260 TLAMs had been fired. About 46-60 Iraqi (and captured Kuwaiti) vessels of widely varying sizes (mostly very small) had been claimed destroyed. NAVCENT forces had captured 74 Iraqi prisoners (determining they were in poor condition with little will to fight) and had liberated two Kuwaiti Islands. Thirty-seven Iraqi mines (mostly drifters) had been located and destroyed to date.

U.S. Navy aircraft losses to that point included one F/A-18, 2 A-6E, and one F-14 shot down, with one aviator rescued and six missing (unknown at the time but three were dead and three captured). An additional badly damaged A-6 had crash-landed in Saudi Arabia on the way back to the carrier. One F/A-18 crashed by accident and the pilot was recovered safely.

At this point, VADM Arthur ordered America around from the Red Sea to the Arabian Gulf and all four carriers in Battle Force Zulu into the

Northern Arabian Gulf in preparation for shifting targeting emphasis from Air Force "strategic" targets to Iraqi Republican Guard and regular Army units in Kuwait in advance of the impending ground campaign. This action put the carriers at half the distance to Kuwait as the nearest USAF bases, resulted in greatly reduced USN reliance on scarce USAF big-wing tankers, and greatly increased USN bomb tonnage per sortie for around-the-clock bombing of Iraqi ground forces in "kill-boxes" in the Kuwaiti desert.

For more on Desert Storm, January 1991 please see attachment H-058-1.



Thai frigate *Prasae* stranded behind enemy lines on the Korean east coast, January 1951. She had gone ashore in a snowstorm on 7 January and had to be destroyed after unsuccessful efforts to pull her off. A helicopter and several U.S. Navy ships, including USS *Endicott* (DMS-35), are offshore covering salvage operations. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-432568)

The Korean War: Chinese Third Phase Offensive in January 1951

On 18 December 1950, the destroyer USS McKean (DD-784) sank a Soviet submarine off Sasebo, Japan, according to a number of accounts. What is certain is that over a two-day period, McKean dropped 88 depth charges on what was originally assessed as a moving submerged target with indications of sonar countermeasure capability. Destroyers Frank Knox (DDR-742), Taussig (DD-746), and destroyer-minelayer Endicott (DMS-35) added yet more

depth charges, and an aircraft overhead sighted the wake of a possible torpedo. Divers subsequently identified the target as the Iona Maru, which had capsized and sank on 10 December 1950. Originally classified as top secret, the event was not publicly known until the book *Blind Man's Bluff* came out in 1998, followed by more accounts claiming that two Soviet submarines were involved and one was sunk, and the "Iona Maru" was a cover story. I concur with the original assessment of the Pacific Fleet intelligence officer, Captain Edwin Layton, as "non-sub." However, there was substantial evidence to the contrary, making this a great study in the extreme difficulty of conducting anti-submarine warfare. You can judge the evidence in attachment H058.2.

By late December 1950, U.S. Marine, Army, and South Korean forces in eastern North Korea had been successfully withdrawn by sea from Hungnam, while in western North Korea, the Chinese had driven the U.S. 8th Army and other United Nations forces all the way back to the 38th Parallel. The battle lines temporarily stabilized and the UN called for a cease-fire. However, against the advice of his senior military commanders, who warned that Chinese logistics lines were severely over-extended, Mao Tse-tung ordered a renewed offensive push (the Third Phase Offensive) that commenced New Year's Eve. Meeting with initial success, the Chinese drove the UN forces out of the South Korean capital of Seoul on 4 January, and the city changed hands for the third time in the war.

As the Chinese attacked, U.S. Navy forces evacuated over 69,000 U.S. personnel and 64,000 Korean nationals from Inchon and blew the port facility before the Chinese took that city as well. For a time the situation appeared so dire that the Supreme UN and U.S. Commander, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, assessed that the Korean Peninsula could not be held without widening the war into China and using atomic weapons. Despite MacArthur's grim assessment,

the new commander of the 8th Army, Lieutenant General Mathew Ridgeway, rallied his forces, halted the Chinese advance (the Chinese running out of supplies was a big help) and began pushing the Chinese back to the north.

During this critical period, the U.S. Navy had four Essex-class fleet carriers (Valley Forge (CV-45), Philippine Sea (CV-47), Leyte (CV-32), and Princeton (CV-37)), a light carrier (USS Bataan (CVL-29)), two escort carriers with Marine aircraft (Sicily (CVE-118) and Badoeng Strait (CVE-116)), assisted by the British carrier *Theseus*, along with the battleship *Missouri* (BB-63) and other U.S. and British cruisers hammering Chinese troops and supply lines despite the atrocious weather conditions. As the USAF was forced to withdraw from airfields near Seoul, the carriers operated with virtual impunity, attacking targets whenever and wherever weather allowed.

Nevertheless, U.S. and UN ships took a pounding from the weather, and on 7 January the Thai frigate *Prasae* ran aground in a blinding snowstorm many miles behind Chinese lines on the east coast of Korea. U.S. ships provided gunfire support to keep the Chinese at bay during repeated but unsuccessful attempts to get *Prasae* off the beach. One U.S. helicopter crashed on board *Prasae*, while Thai crewmen in boats trying to pull the ship off were washed overboard, although most were saved. With boat transfer impossible, 118 Thai crewmen were evacuated off the ship in 40 helicopter sorties flown by Navy enlisted pilot Chief Duane Thorin over a three-day period under extreme weather conditions. (Thorin would make over 130 rescues behind enemy lines before he was captured, and was the inspiration for the rescue helicopter pilot in the book/movie, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*.) The beached *Prasae* was then destroyed by gunfire from the U.S. ships (and later replaced by a transferred U.S. frigate).

During this period, patterns would develop that would largely persist for the rest of the war. Ashore, UN and Chinese forces would duke it out

in bloody battles without either side gaining much ground. U.S. carrier forces would wage a protracted and hazardous air campaign against bridges and tunnels in the eastern half of North Korea. U.S. and UN surface ships would bombard targets along the North Korean coast. U.S. minesweepers worked along the coast to clear lanes for the gunfire ships, and on 2 February, the minesweeper Partridge (AMS-31) struck a mine and sank in ten minutes with the loss of ten aboard, including the commanding officer. In mid-February U.S. and UN naval forces commenced a blockade of the North Korean port and rail/road chokepoint of Wonsan, in what would become the longest naval blockade in modern history at over 800 days. Around Wonsan U.S. ships and enemy shore batteries conducted almost daily gunfire duels for the rest of the war. Numerous U.S. ships would be hit, but none sunk.

For more on U.S. naval action in the Korean War in January/February 1951 please see attachment H-058-2.



Rear Admiral (lower half) Philip R. McNall, USN. (National Archives Photo 6369400)

Passing of RDML Phillip F. McNall, SC, USN (Ret.)

It is with deep regret I inform you of the passing of Rear Admiral (lower half) Phillip Freeman McNall, Supply Corps, U.S. Navy (Retired), on 28 November 2020, at age 85. Phil entered the U.S. Naval Academy in June 1954 and served as a supply corps officer until his retirement in September 1988 as the commanding officer, Aviation Supply Office, Philadelphia. Among many assignments he served as the supply officer for USS New Orleans (LPH-11) for a Vietnam War deployment and USS Nimitz (CVAN-68), and as commanding officer of Naval Supply Center San Diego and Commander Naval Logistics Pacific.

After a year at Hamilton College, NY, Phil McNall gained an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy, entering on 28 June 1954 with the class of 1958, earning a bachelor of science in Naval Science. He graduated and was commissioned an ensign on 4 June 1958. His first assignment was aboard the amphibious command ship USS Estes (AGC-12) homeported in San Diego, deploying in 1959 for amphibious exercises in Japan, Korea, Okinawa, and Borneo. Selected for the U.S. Navy Supply Corps, he reported in September 1960 to the Naval Supply Corps School, Athens, Georgia. In May 1961, Lieutenant (junior grade) McNall reported to the Naval Supply Center San Diego as Assistant to the Director, Control Department/Director Data Processing Department. Promoted to lieutenant in June 1962, he subsequently attended the Naval Post Graduate School, Monterey, California, in November 1964, graduating in October 1966 with a master's degree in operations research, and where he was promoted to lieutenant commander in July 1966.

In October 1966, LCDR McNall commenced duty at the Naval Supply Systems Command in Washington D.C. In February 1969, he was selected to serve as aide to Vice Admiral Edwin B. Hooper, the Navy Member of the Joint Logistics

Review Board in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. In July 1970, LCDR McNall assumed duty as supply officer aboard amphibious assault ship New Orleans for operations that included flagship for Commander FIRST Fleet, support to President Richard M. Nixon's visit to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, recovery of the Apollo 14 Astronauts south of Samoa, and a Western Pacific deployment including operations off Vietnam. Promoted to commander in September 1971, he detached from New Orleans in July 1972 and reported to the Naval War College Newport, where he was the distinguished graduate in 1973.

In June 1973, CDR McNall reported to the Fleet Material Support Office, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, as Director, Supply System Evaluation Department. In March 1967, CDR McNall reported to recently-commissioned nuclear aircraft carrier USS Nimitz as supply officer for Nimitz's first deployment, to the Mediterranean in 1976-77. In July 1977, CDR McNall reported to the Aviation Supply Office (ASO,) Philadelphia, as planning and data systems officer, where he was promoted to captain in September 1977. In June 1979, CAPT McNall then became executive officer for the ASO.

In June 1980, CAPT McNall assumed command of the Naval Supply Center, San Diego. In June 1982, CAPT McNall assumed duty at the Naval Supply Systems Command headquarters in Washington D.C. In July 1983, he was designated a rear admiral (lower half) for duty in a billet commensurate with the rank, reporting to Honolulu as Commander Naval Logistics Command Pacific and Force Supply Officer for the U.S. Pacific Fleet. He was promoted to rear admiral (lower half) on 1 July 1984 and designated a material professional in 1985. In August 1986, RDML McNall assumed command of the Aviation Supply Office, Philadelphia, where he served until his retirement in September 1988.

RDML McNall's awards include the Legion of Merit (3 awards,) Meritorious Service Medal, Joint

Service Commendation Medal, Battle Efficiency Ribbon (USS Nimitz), National Defense Service Medal (two awards), Vietnam Service Medal with one bronze star, and the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon.

Following his retirement from the Navy, RDML McNall served as a consultant in the defense industry and as a golf teaching professional. With a passion for jazz music, he was a member of the Leaders' Circle at SF Jazz, San Francisco. A service will be held at the Mount Albion Cemetery, Albion, New York, at a date to be determined.

RDML McNall served the U.S. Navy with extraordinary dedication and distinction, providing leadership by example for future generations of supply corps officers. He excelled in some of the toughest and most consequential positions in the Supply Corps at sea and afloat, in some of the best times and some of the leanest times in the U.S. Navy during the Cold War. He set the Supply Department on the new nuclear carrier Nimitz on the path to continued excellence during her very first deployment. As Commander of the Naval Supply Center San Diego and then Naval Logistics Command Pacific, he played a key leadership role in bringing the U.S. Navy out of the post-Vietnam doldrums and enabling audacious operations by the U.S. Pacific Fleet at the height of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, which served to help bring about an end to the Cold War. As Commander of the Aviation Supply Office in Philadelphia, he played a major role in bringing naval aviation to new heights of readiness, the would shortly afterwards be demonstrated in Operation Desert Storm. It is leaders like RDML McNall that have enabled the Navy Supply Corps to provide the best logistics support of any Navy in the world. He will be truly missed, but his example and legacy will live on.

Rest in Peace Admiral McNall.

As always, you are welcome to forward H-grams to spread these stories of U.S. Navy valor and sacrifice. Prior issues of H-grams, enhanced with photos, can be found here [<https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams.html>] ... plus lots of other cool stuff on Naval History and Heritage Command's website.



A Strike Fighter Squadron 81 (VFA-81) F/A-18C Hornet aircraft flies over the sea during Operation Desert Shield. The aircraft is carrying an AIM-9 Sidewinder missile on each wing tip. VFA-81 is based aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Saratoga* (CV-60). (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921–2008)

H-058-1: Operation Desert Storm, Part 6 (January 1991)

H-058-1 Desert Shield/Desert Storm Part 6 (January 1991)

Samuel J. Cox, Director, Naval History and Heritage Command

Desert Storm Deployment, USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC-19), September 1990–January 1991

Operation Desert Shield, Arabian Gulf, January–March 1991.

0230 17 January 1991. Central Arabian Gulf, Underway on USS *Blue Ridge*. "Battle Stations"

This series is a departure from my normal H-Grams in that this is a personal recollection. I was the Current Intelligence Officer/Iraq Analyst on the Intelligence Staff of Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, for the entirety of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, serving under VADM Hank Mauz and VADM Stan Arthur. I first wrote this a number of years after the fact but I kept it true to what I believed and understood to be true at the time, so my dim view of joint operations as conducted during Desert Storm (which held the Navy back from making maximum contribution to the war) and U.S. Central Command, particularly the Intelligence Support Architecture, will be readily apparent. My reward for this heresy was to spend 12 of the next 21 years in joint commands, including three years as commander of the U.S. Central Command Joint Intelligence Center, where I had opportunity to

see significant improvement in U.S. joint operations.

“General Quarters! General Quarters! All hands man your battle stations!” This time, it was for real. It wasn’t a surprise. I’d been lying awake in my bunk in the midnight hours, waiting for it. The “Mother of all Battles” was about to begin, and we were going to start it.

Waiting for the war to begin, I was unable to sleep, so I was re-reading some letters from my wife as well as one my father sent me several months earlier. I’d called my parents from Japan when we first received word we would be deploying to the Arabian Gulf (in early August 1990). It was a short conversation; I couldn’t say much because our movement was still classified. I just said that we were “shipping out,” watch the news, and that I loved them. By my choice of words, my dad knew exactly what I meant. I suspect he said the same thing to his parents when he shipped out to Korea, and heard the same thing from his father when he shipped out to the Solomon Islands during WWII. I suspected I now had some idea what my father and grandfather were thinking when they went off to war, and my dad’s letter confirmed that he understood completely; it was a very special letter.

As I made my way forward through the dark red-lit passageway to my battle station, a word processor in the staff intelligence office, my state of mind was calm and fatalistic. It was a strange feeling; I didn’t want to be going to war, but I certainly didn’t want to be anywhere else than right where I was. This would be one for the history books, no matter how it turned out.

I arrived in the office and looked at the TV monitor with the tactical display, and marveled at the incredible blob of blue aircraft symbols approaching the Iraqi border. No one had ever seen anything like it. I took a sharp breath, thinking, “Well, here it goes.”

We knew special operations forces were already attacking Iraqi early warning radar sites, and Tomahawk land-attack cruise missiles were already launching from nearby Navy warships. Within a few minutes, the blue blob of hundreds of U.S. and Allied aircraft and cruise missiles would cross the border and begin striking Iraqi targets. We wouldn’t be able to see it on the monitor, but Iraqi surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft artillery would be rising to meet our aircraft. Since it was the middle of the night, we didn’t expect much opposition from the Iraqi air force. Only one thing was for sure, a lot of people were going to die in the next hour.

I was neither excited about going to war, nor was I particularly afraid. One thing about being the Iraqi “subject matter expert” on the intelligence staff was that I had the most realistic knowledge of anyone on just how much danger we were really in, or weren’t. Vice Admiral Arthur decided he preferred to fight from at-sea, so a week before the start of the war, the *Blue Ridge* got underway from Bahrain and began operating in the north-central Arabian Gulf. Some of us suspected the real reason for his decision was to unplug the phones since CENTCOM had become increasingly meddlesome as more and more colonels arrived at the headquarters in Riyadh as the war approached. But getting underway did make us safer in my view. By no longer acting as a fixed target welded to the pier in Mina Salman, we eliminated the threat from Iraqi ballistic missiles and commando/terrorist attacks, and we made it much more difficult for the Iraqi air force to find us. The Iraqi Mirage F-1s would have to fight their way past several Aegis cruisers, and fighters from three carrier air wings, to get to us. Unlike the *Stark* attack in 1987, we would be ready and waiting for them. Iraqi missile boats would have to fight their way through a similar gauntlet of warships and fighter-bombers. The aircraft flying into Iraq, and U.S. ships and Marines operating closer to the Iraqi and Kuwait coastlines, would face serious threats. About the only way the Iraqis could hurt the NAVCENT flagship would be if we

were unlucky enough to hit one of the drifting mines. While this was definitely possible, the odds were against it.

Nevertheless, as the expression goes, "You don't know what you don't know." Did Saddam Hussein have any surprises up his sleeve? We assumed that all the threats of "making the sand burn under our feet" were just a bunch of propaganda bluster, but it stuck in the back of our minds nonetheless. The big unknown concerned if and when Saddam would resort to using weapons of mass destruction.

In January 1991, Saddam did have chemical weapons and had recently used them, and Iraq did have biological weapons capability, an ongoing nuclear weapons program, and was manufacturing ballistic missiles with the range to hit Israel, Riyadh, and Bahrain. The chemical weapons threat was the most likely. Iraq had used chemical artillery shells, rockets, and bombs to defeat Iranian human wave attacks during the Iran-Iraq war, killing many thousands of Iranian soldiers. Iraq had even dropped chemical bombs on Kurd villages inside Iraq, indiscriminately gassing several thousand Kurdish men, women and children to a horrible, choking death. There was no doubt Saddam retained numerous chemical weapons and the proven means to deliver them. Did he still have the will to use them?

There was less certainty about Saddam's biological weapons capability. We believed Iraq definitely had developed biologic agents that could be used as weapons, but developing a means to deliver them accurately and reliably, without being a greater danger to the Iraqis themselves, was a tough challenge. Nevertheless, the briefing I prepared for the admiral earlier in Desert Shield on anthrax had been a real eye-opener for everyone, including me. I had always viewed biological weapons as just a somewhat nastier form of chemical warfare. The reality is that it is a quantum leap more dangerous in terms of

lethality, area of coverage, and persistence. When I was finished with the brief, everyone was pretty much speechless. Since there wasn't much of anything we could do about it, except don our standard chemical defense gear (in which no one had much faith even for standard chemical warfare), we basically decided to ignore it.

We also knew the Iraqis had a nuclear weapons program, and in fact the Israelis had bombed the Osirik reactor in 1981 in a successful attempt to set the program back a decade. The national intelligence estimates early in Desert Shield discounted that the Iraqis had developed any nuclear weapons, although they were certainly working on it. As the likelihood of going to war increased, some reports from national agencies became more alarmist, and just before the war we received a report that maybe the Iraqis might have already produced one or two nuclear bombs. Since there wasn't much we could do about it if they had, the attitude among senior officers at NAVCENT when I briefed this bit of news can pretty much be summed up by, "Well, I guess we'll find out soon enough."

The level of apprehension increased as the mass of blue symbols crossed into Iraqi airspace. The display was not like a video game; there was no way to tell what was really going on. In some ways it was like watching water boil, as the symbols moved nearly imperceptibly. It was impossible to keep track of individual aircraft, and as successive waves of aircraft and cruise missiles went in, it became hard to tell if all the aircraft going in were coming out. It looked like they were, but voice reports were lagging well behind the slow-motion action on the tactical display. Hopes began to go up though. If our new tactics weren't working, then we probably would have been losing enough aircraft to be noticeable (see H-Gram 056). Finally, reports began to come in. The AAA was intense, but our aircraft were above it. Iraqi surface-to-air missiles were going "stupid," their guidance disrupted by our jamming, electronic countermeasures, and high-speed anti-radiation

missiles (HARM) launched against the Iraqi acquisition and guidance radars. Strike leaders from the first wave began reporting mission success.

There was one loss on the first wave. The first U.S. aircraft shot down during Desert Storm was a Navy F/A-18 strike-fighter, piloted by Lieutenant Commander Scott Speicher, flying from *Saratoga* (CV-60). The initial reports indicated the jet was hit by some kind of missile at higher altitude (above the AAA envelope) and exploded in a ball of fire. There was no sign that the pilot survived the explosion or that he successfully ejected, but in the darkness and confusion this was not necessarily conclusive. In the days following, there was discussion on the staff about why Lieutenant Commander Speicher was the only jet to be hit by a missile, when the new tactics appeared to work against all the other Iraqi surface-to-air missiles. There were reports that at least one Iraqi MIG-25 Foxbat managed to get airborne the first night and was in the vicinity of Speicher's jet, leading to speculation the Foxbat had collided with Speicher in the darkness, or had hit Speicher with an air-to-air missile, which if true would make Speicher the only U.S. pilot to be downed by Iraqi air-to-air fire. Lieutenant Commander Speicher was the only U.S. pilot to remain unaccounted for at the end of the war. There was no evidence at the time that he'd been captured by the Iraqis, although inconclusive claims that he was surfaced years later. To this day, he is listed as Missing in Action, his body never found. (2021 comment: Speicher's remains were finally found in the Iraqi desert and on 2 August 2009 the Navy stated the identification was conclusive. Although still officially listed as being downed by a surface-to-air missile, the evidence that he was actually shot down by a Mig-25 Foxbat flown by Lieutenant Zuhair Daewood, is rather convincing. There is some evidence two other U.S. (not Navy) aircraft might have been downed by Iraqi aircraft later in the war).

18 January 1991. Central Arabian Gulf, Underway on USS Blue Ridge. "Moment of Truth."

The third night of the Desert Storm air campaign was fast approaching. The Naval Forces Central Command intelligence officer, Commander Wayne Perras, bounded out of his office heading for the door. All he said was, "Sam!" and motioned for me to follow immediately. We rushed into the command center on the flagship, where Vice Admiral Arthur was directing an urgent rescue operation.

One of our aircraft, an A-6 Intruder medium attack bomber, had been shot down the night before on a mining mission near the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr. We had just received a transmission and position from one of the aircrew's survival radios suggesting they might be alive. The admiral had already ordered the launch of a rescue helicopter. Any delay meant the helicopter could not reach the position before nightfall and the rescue would have to be aborted. Now Admiral Arthur wanted to know if we could safely get the helo in and out of the area. Commander Perras turned to me.

As the current intelligence officer, it was my responsibility to know current Iraqi forces activity, locations, and capabilities. If I said yes, and I was wrong, the rescue helo would get shot down. If I said no, and I was wrong, an aircrew would be captured by the Iraqis.

Naturally, the position of the downed aircrew was not in an easy yes or no area. I had to make a snap judgment, without time to go back and study my order-of-battle charts, on the capability of the Iraqi antiaircraft guns near the area to successfully engage the rescue helicopter. It was the ultimate closed book pop quiz. I knew where the SAM sites and guns were, and the capability of the Iraqi ground forces in the area, because of the painstaking and meticulous plotting of thousands of Iraqi movements done by the two enlisted intelligence specialists (IS) who worked for me. I had memorized their work, but there was not time

for me to re-check each of their plots. I had to trust them, as Commander Perras was trusting me, as Admiral Arthur was trusting him.

In my judgment, it was not impossible for the helo to get in and out since the area was below Iraqi surface-to-air missile site coverage, but the probability of success was very low due to heavy small-caliber ground fire in the area. Too much good luck was required. My answer was, "No, sir."

To my surprise, no one asked me to explain further, they simply trusted me. The admiral ordered the recall of the rescue helo. (Actually, while CDR Perras and I were standing by to talk to VADM Arthur, he had just already recalled the helo on account it would be too dark, but my assessment passed via CDR Perras reaffirmed the decision).

In the hours after the event though, I agonized over my response. I poured over the charts, double and triple checking the plots in that area. There were no errors in my IS's work, and I had remembered it correctly. But once again I questioned whether I really wanted this kind of responsibility. Perhaps it would be better to be somewhere else, where I didn't have to wonder if I had just condemned two aircrew to capture and torture by the Iraqis.

Once again, I reached the same conclusion I had off of Lebanon. No, there is no place else I would rather have been.

If I hadn't been there, someone else would have had to make that tough call. But I was there, so it might as well be me. And I believed I could do it as well as it could be done. That was why I had signed up. That was why I had stayed in.

Nevertheless, my conscience was uneasy until the end of the war and we got our POW's back. The aircrew from that A-6 were not among them. The Iraqis had found their survival radio and were

possibly trying to lure us into an ambush. The aircrew had already both been dead.

(2021 Comment. This was the VA-155 minelaying mission launched from *Ranger* (CVA-61) on the evening of 17 January. An A-6E flown by LT William Costen and Bombardier/Navigator LT Charles Turner was shot down while coming off target. During the day on 18 January there were indications that both had ejected, however neither apparently survived as the Iraqis recovered their bodies and turned the remains over to the U.S. in March 1991 after the war).



Flight deck crewmen aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Saratoga* (CV-60) watch as an EA-6B Intruder aircraft is launched during Operation Desert Shield. An Attack Squadron 35 (VA-35) A-6E Intruder aircraft is at right. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921–2008)

Late January 1991. Central Arabian Gulf, Underway on USS Blue Ridge: "Oops."

My, "Oh, s***!" was drowned out by the cheer from the crowd looking at the weapons system video that showed a spectacular explosion on an Iraqi tanker due to a bomb from a Navy A-6 Intruder attack jet. The pilot and bombardier/navigator in the A-6 could be heard on the tape whooping it up as well. The bomb was a bullseye right at the base of the tanker's superstructure. However, this incident is a case study in the effect of "the fog of war" and "first reports are always wrong."

The initial report that came into the command center was quite alarming. The report from a U.S. Navy aircraft said that an empty “small” Iraqi tanker had been sighted transiting underway south along the Kuwait coast, with a “fire control” radar of some kind installed on the superstructure, and most ominously, in company with (or possibly towing) a missile boat. The report was already garbled. The implication was that the tanker was a threat since it was heading for U.S. forces, possibly serving as a shield to hide the missile boat, possibly with hidden surface-to-air missiles on board to ambush U.S. aircraft, and the tanker could be used as a weapon itself by trying to ram a U.S. ship. I thought the report sounded dubious, but I wasn’t on the scene, and the scenario was not out of the realm of possibility. Presumably, Admiral Arthur had given the OK to attack the tanker to Rear Admiral March on *Midway (CV-41)*, commander of the carriers in the Arabian Gulf.

Based on numerous experiences, I’d always found it prudent to take aircrew recognitions with a grain of salt. I always fully understood that looking at a photo after the event was a very different thing than trying to correctly identify a target while flying at a very high rate of speed, frequently in poor light or even while being shot at. In this case, however, I was looking at the exact same cockpit display at the exact same speed that the aircrew had been and it took me a fraction of a second to see that the attack was a mistake.

When the “oohs” and “ahs” subsided, I reported to my boss that the tanker was Iraqi, but that everything else about the report was wrong. The tanker was the *Amuriyah*. She wasn’t a “small” tanker, nor was she empty. *Amuriyah* was a 150,000 deadweight ton (i.e., a “supertanker”) *al Qaddasiyah*-class tanker, and she was clearly riding low, full of oil. Nor was she underway. The anchor chain, with tension on, was clearly visible, even in real time, nor was there any bow wave. In fact, she was anchored in the exact same spot that she had been in for over two months near the

Iraqis’ Mina al Bakr offshore oil transshipment terminal, over 30 miles from the position reported in the original sighting. The “fire control” radar was the standard commercial surface search and navigation radar of a type ubiquitous on merchant ships throughout the world. The small boat tied up to the stern of *Amuriyah* was not a missile boat, but was one of the small *Winchester*-class hovercraft that the Iraqis routinely used for logistics resupply to the oil terminals and tankers anchored in the northern Gulf.

We’d just blown up a huge tanker because of one of the most bogus operational reports I’ve ever seen, before or since. Word went around the staff a couple days later that this incident had provoked one of General Schwarzkopf’s famously angry telephone calls in which he fulminated to Vice Admiral Arthur, “What the f*** are your out-of-control Navy fly-boys doing blowing up g**d*** tankers?!!” Or words to that effect. In this case, I don’t think General Schwarzkopf was necessarily wrong. The good news was that *Amuriyah*’s huge cargo of oil was burning up, polluting Iranian skies, rather than making a giant slick in the Gulf.

(2021 Comment. Exactly where in the chain the report became so garbled is hard to say. I relate it as I received it, which is why I was not expecting to see *Amuriyah* on the weapon systems video. However, VADM Arthur gave approval to strike the tanker after Battle Force Zulu (CTF-154) commander RADM Dan March requested permission to strike the tanker. According to Marv Pokrant’s (NAVCENT CNA Rep) book, RADM March reported that a *Midway* A-6E had identified the tanker as an *al-Qaddasiyah* class tanker (as was *Amuriyah*) and that the tanker was providing raid count and other Intelligence to the Iraqi air defense network. (This would have been news to me at the time as I was well aware that Iraqis on the nearby Mina al-Bakr oil transshipment terminal were doing exactly that kind of Intelligence reporting, but I had seen nothing of the kind regarding any of the five Iraqi supertankers in the Northern Arabian Gulf). VADM Arthur agreed with

RADM March that such Intel reporting from *Amuriyah* made it a valid military target. In fact, so far as anyone in NAVCENT knew, *Amuriyah* and the other four supertankers were valid military targets as they were on the original Air Tasking Order (ATO) target list, at the insistence of CENTCOM commander General Schwarzkopf. What no one in NAVCENT knew was that on 17 January, General Schwarzkopf changed his mind and ordered the supertankers removed from the target list and sent a message at "priority" precedence. Due to the communications logjam, any messages sent below "flash" or "op immediate" precedence were doomed to oblivion, and sure enough, General Schwarzkopf's message was not received aboard the NAVCENT flagship until 28 January. Also, when *Amuriyah* was hit, the *Winchester* hovercraft took refuge under the Mina al-Bakr platform; other *Midway A-6s* flushed it out and sank it. The *Winchesters* were carried in the Iraqi naval order of battle, so there was no question it was a valid target).

But it got worse. Several days after we hit *Amuriyah*, (which subsequently broke apart and sank) I received a FIST (Fleet Imagery Support Terminal) image of the Kuwaiti oil loading piers at Mina al Ahmadi, "bonus" coverage from some higher priority CENTCOM land target no doubt. The picture showed that the four fully-loaded Iraqi supertankers that had been at the piers since November were still there, but they were riding high. The Iraqis had done exactly what we feared they might; they had dumped the cargos of all four supertankers into the Gulf. Not only that, but they had opened the valves at both Mina al Ahmadi and Mina al Bakr and were pumping oil directly into the Gulf from shore. The Iraqis were dumping oil into the Gulf for at least 48 hours before we even knew.

At the next first light, one of our Navy aircraft reported that the oil slick was already over thirty miles long and almost ten miles wide (and although we didn't know then, it was over three feet thick). Not only was it an environmental

catastrophe of enormous magnitude, but we knew from our analysis of drift currents that the slick would move south, threatening Saudi desalinization plants which supplied the vital water for our forces on the ground still scrambling to get ready for our counteroffensive into Kuwait.

It didn't take long for another apoplectic secure call from General Schwarzkopf to come in to Vice Admiral Arthur. This one was discussed at length among the staff, but can be briefly summarized as, "Why the f*** wasn't I told this could happen, and why the f*** did it take us so long to find out?"

In this case, he was quite wrong. He had absolutely no idea that this was even a possibility because his staff hadn't told him. Since November we had sent repeated messages and phone calls to CENTCOM requesting imagery collection emphasis on the five Iraqi supertankers (including *Amuriyah*) in the Gulf because we were extremely concerned that they would do exactly what they wound up doing. CENTCOM was totally uninterested and unconcerned. What little collection coverage we got before the event was because we were able to convince our embarked CIA team of the importance and consequences, and they were able to convince their headquarters that this was an issue of some national priority.

One of the Iraqi supertankers was in the northern Gulf at the start of the war, but the other four (including *al Fao* and *Amuriyah*) had returned to Iraq in August through October and had been allowed to pass through the Coalition Maritime Interception Operation because they were empty. We first became concerned in October when the Iraqis moved two of the supertankers to the Kuwaiti facility, anchored *Amuriyah* off Mina al Bakr, and then later moved two more of the supertankers to Kuwait.

At first we thought it might have been a simple case that the Iraqis just needed someplace to "park" the giant ships, but that didn't explain why

they filled all of them with more crude oil. With the UN embargo in full force, they certainly weren't going to go anywhere with that oil any time before the crises were resolved. We reached the conclusion that the Iraqis had positioned the loaded supertankers so that they could be used as a defense against a U.S. amphibious assault into Kuwait by dumping the cargo as a barrier and perhaps setting fire to it. Other possibilities, none of them good, involved using the ships for environmental terrorism, to foul desalinization plants, or even as "fire ships" to ram U.S. ships. The yawn from CENTCOM could be heard all the way to the Arabian Gulf. After the event, CENTCOM suddenly got very interested.

As early as November, we at NAVCENT had assessed that Hussein had a plan to dump large amounts of oil into the Arabian Gulf for whatever reason. Given the substantial effort that went into the Iraqis' planning and execution of the destruction of hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells, I still think it reasonable to believe that Saddam intended to deliberately spill oil in the Gulf as part of that larger plan regardless of what we did. Nevertheless, a close review of the timeline will show that we blew up one of his supertankers first, and it is not out of the question that he may have dumped the oil either in retaliation or as a premature "use it or lose it" response. (2021 Comment. Some accounts well after the war claimed that, although we didn't know it at the time, we hit *Amuriyah* as she was just starting to dump her cargo of oil into the Gulf. This was based on reported observation that she was sitting in an oil slick when hit. Based on the timeline, this is plausible. However, USN aircraft also hit the nearby Mina al Bakr oil transshipment terminal on the opening night of the war (it was on the ATO) and the oil spill around *Amuriyah* could have originated at Mina al Bakr as well. Also, despite what we understood on the staff at the time regarding General Schwarzkopf's second call, he apparently was mostly upset about and wanted to know why the Kuwaiti Sea Island oil transshipment terminal

(SIOT) was on fire, which had also been taken off the ATO target list. As it turned out, USN aircraft bombed what was reported as the Spasilac minelayer (but actually a Sawahil self-propelled barge), a valid target, near the SIOT, which is what caused the fire on SIOT).

By the time of the start of the ground war in late February, much of the oil spill had drifted away and the worst potential effects on military operations had been mitigated. The same could not be said for the sea and bird life, but then the Arabian Gulf had been a polluted environmental disaster even well before the war.

(2021 comment. Accounts after the war have claimed the General Schwarzkopf was aware of the potential of the supertankers to dump oil in the Gulf, which is why he changed his mind and took them off the ATO target list on 17 September. If so, his interest never filtered down to the CENTCOM Intelligence Collection Managers as far as anyone at NAVCENT could tell).



A Mark 7 16-inch/50 caliber gun is fired aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* (BB-63) as night shelling of Iraqi targets takes place along the northern Kuwaiti coast during Operation Desert Storm. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921–2008)

Late January 1991. Central Arabian Gulf, Underway on USS Blue Ridge. "Sands of Mina al Ahmadi."

(2021 Comment: I have been told by sources close to then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell that the amphibious operation in Desert Storm was intended as a deception from beginning to end and that the last-minute shift to "real" planning was never sanctioned by Washington. Nevertheless, there were periods on the flagship that we knew the plan was a deception, and a subsequent period when we were informed it was for real).

The reason there was no amphibious landing by U.S. Marines into Kuwait was because we would have had to literally destroy Kuwait to save it. The planned landing beach in Kuwait was lined by high-rise apartment buildings in the southern suburbs of Kuwait City, which would have been pulverized by battleship gunfire in order to adequately suppress Iraqi defenses to enable success of the landing. The best beach in Kuwait was even worse; it was right in the middle of Kuwait's giant Mina al Ahmadi oil refinery.

In the end, just the threat of an amphibious assault served to tie down many Iraqi divisions guarding against an attack that never came. However, in the preparations for the coalition counterattack into Kuwait, an amphibious assault was not always intended as a "deception plan." The planning was quite real.

Planning for an amphibious assault began almost as soon as the Iraqi invasion itself. As the staff current intelligence officer, I was called upon to provide intelligence support throughout the different planning phases, and nothing I had learned in intelligence school prepared me for supporting an opposed amphibious assault into an oil refinery.

Planning initially focused on the possibility of having to extract U.S. personnel from the American embassy in Kuwait City, which was

surrounded, but not occupied initially, by Iraqi forces. As each day and week went by, more and more Iraqi troops poured into Kuwait, vastly outnumbering initial U.S. amphibious forces in the Arabian Gulf. It quickly became apparent that an attempt to forcibly extract the U.S. diplomats from the embassy compound would be costly and unlikely to succeed. Eventually, after a "siege" lasting several months, the Iraqis permitted the U.S. diplomats to be withdrawn via Iraq.

From the very beginning, an opposed amphibious assault into Iraq or Kuwait was viewed as a very high-risk and high-casualty operation. The Iraqis quickly showed their respect for the threat from U.S. Marines by immediately digging in and heavily fortifying the beaches with interlocking and layered defensive positions. The Iraqis clearly demonstrated their intent to extract a high price. In addition, none of the potential landing beaches were particularly good to begin with, generally with too shallow a gradient, which made them ideal for defensive mining and required long run-ins by landing craft and long runs by exposed personnel; such a landing would have had a lot in common with Tarawa in WWII.

The most southerly acceptable beach was near Ras al Qulayah, Kuwait, but it was only about a dozen miles behind Iraqi lines along the Kuwait-Saudi border, which made it hardly worth the high risk. The next beach to the north was split in two parts by the Mina al Ahmadi oil transshipment terminal and bordered the huge Kuwait oil refinery, the single most important facility to the Kuwaiti economy after the oil fields themselves.

The next beach to the north from the refinery was in a heavily urbanized area, lined with multi-story residential buildings that provided ideal cover for defending forces. Further to the north, the beaches on the north side of Kuwait Bay and on Bubiyan Island were subject to very wide tidal variations. These beaches were at best extremely shallow, and at worst consisted of miles of mud flats, all leading to bottlenecks that would greatly

constrain the ability of the Marines to maneuver once they were ashore; the potential for the Marines to get trapped was high.

Furthest to the north were the beaches on the al Faw Peninsula in Iraq proper, which had characteristics similar to the Bubiyan and Kuwait Bay beaches. Although landing on the al Faw would have been the most audacious approach, worthy of MacArthur at Inchon, moving off the al Faw inland to Iraq would have been extremely difficult, especially in the winter months when the al Faw turned into a swamp. The Iranians had tried it during the Iran-Iraq War, crossing the Shatt al-Arab waterway in a brilliantly executed surprise amphibious assault, only to become bogged down in months of horrific close quarters combat in muck like that of Flanders Fields and the Somme in WWI.

The least bad option appeared to be the beach at the Kuwaiti refinery; it was far enough behind Iraqi lines so that enough would be gained to make the risk worthwhile, but not so far that it might result in "a bridge too far." Nevertheless, it quickly became apparent that conducting combat operations in a refinery was not covered in any doctrine, nor could it be considered recommended; there were many things in a refinery capable of blowing up even without bullets and shells whizzing around.

Besides numerous oil and refined product tanks, oil and fuel lines, cracking towers, and other explosive or flammable infrastructure, the biggest problem was the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) facility right in the middle of the refinery, very near the beach. An immense amount of analytic effort went into trying to determine the answer to the question, "What happens if that thing blows up during the landing?"

No one really seemed to know the answer, and it certainly wasn't in any intelligence publications or databases. I eventually was able to get an answer from some oil industry experts via our CIA liaison

team, but it took a couple months. The answer was that if the biggest LNG storage tank went up, it would explode with the force of somewhere between a two and six megaton nuclear bomb, which would basically destroy the entire refinery, along with Kuwait's economic future, not to mention the entire landing force. (2021 Comment: I still don't think anyone really knows for sure other than that it would have been a really gigantic explosion).

The next question became, should we preemptively destroy the LNG facility before the landing, or risk having the Iraqis blow it as a defensive measure during the landing, or risk having it blow up by chance during the crossfire? It didn't take long for enthusiasm for an amphibious assault to quickly wane on the NAVCENT staff.

But the plot thickened as the Iraqis moved the four fully-loaded supertankers to the oil loading terminals just off the refinery, which bisected the beach. This provoked even more difficult questions. What were the Iraqis up to? Although it was possible the Iraqis just needed someplace to moor the large tankers, why were they fully loaded? They weren't going to be able to export oil anytime soon with UN sanctions and the naval "blockade" in full operation.

We reached the conclusion that the Iraqis intended to use the tankers to discharge oil into the water as a defensive measure just prior to an amphibious assault. This led to even more questions. How big an oil slick would it cause? How thick? What would be the effect of the oil slick on amphibious landing craft trying to motor through it? Would it clog intakes and engines and immobilize the craft? What would be the effect of the fumes from the slick on Marines in the landing craft? Would the fumes be debilitating or even toxic? Would the effect of the fumes be temporary or represent a permanent health risk? Would standard chemical-biological-radiological (CBR) gear be needed, or even work, in the fumes?

What would happen if the Iraqis set fire to the oil slick during the landing? Needless to say, I hadn't learned any of this in school.

But, it got even better. I received human intelligence reports that the Iraqis were installing "electro-shock" weapons on the beach intended to electrocute Marines attempting to land. How did that work? Was it even feasible? Would the sea act as a giant ground or short-circuit? How much power would need to be put into the water to generate the desired effect? Did the Iraqis have the ability to generate that much power? As with the LNG questions, no one in any intelligence agency really knew for sure, although it appeared to be technically possible to electrify knee-deep water in a localized area.

Then came an overhead photo that showed some sort of discoloration near some storage buildings in the port area of the refinery, leading to speculation that the Iraqis were making a big "ANFO" bomb (basically a big version of a "fertilizer" bomb like that later used in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh) that would be powerful enough to destroy the entire port area during the landing, or even set off the LNG plant.

Although I began to suspect the electroshock and ANFO-bomb reports were bogus, they didn't even come close to being the most outrageous; that distinction belonged to the reports of Iraqis bayoneting Kuwaiti babies in incubators (supposedly the German "Huns" had done the same thing to Belgian babies in Allied propaganda at the start of WWI), although the most outlandish report had to be the one about an "underwater" landing strip in Lake Tharthar that the Iraqis could raise and lower. It didn't take long before I reached the conclusion that most human intelligence reporting was pure junk, but trying to "disprove" such reports took a lot of time and was frequently impossible.

I don't know precisely when the planning for an amphibious assault transitioned to "deception"

planning, but by late November it was pretty apparent. My first real indication was when my boss gave me a stack of intelligence messages and told me, "Don't ask questions, but what would be the intelligence 'damage' if these messages were to fall into Iraqi hands?"

I provided my assessment, but it didn't take a genius to figure out that if the Iraqis got a hold of those particular messages, it would reinforce their belief that the U.S. intended to conduct an amphibious assault. Reinforcing something that the enemy already believes is the most effective technique of operational deception.

Soon after, I was "read in" on the deception plan. As a result, I watched all the high-profile media reporting we were allowing on amphibious rehearsals in the United Arab Emirates, and later along the north coast of Saudi Arabia (exercise Imminent Thunder), with a unique perspective; we were blatantly telegraphing our intent to conduct an amphibious assault, and the international press was the means to make sure the Iraqis got the message.

The people who didn't get the message were the Marine and Navy planners aboard the Amphibious Task Force and in the two Marine Expeditionary Brigades that would conduct any actual amphibious assault. No one told them they were the deception plan. They thought they were going to be fighting and dying on the beaches of Kuwait, and they became increasingly and understandably annoyed and angry when none of their requests for increased intelligence collection of the beach areas were approved by CENTCOM. Although there were a small number of us at NAVCENT who knew the details of the deception plan, it appeared that just about everyone at CENTCOM did, and they weren't about to divert any scarce intelligence collection assets to support an amphibious assault that they knew wasn't really going to happen. This put those of us on the NAVCENT staff in the awkward and uncomfortable position of trying to explain to

irate planners in the Amphibious Task Force why they weren't getting squat for help from us or CENTCOM without revealing details of the highly compartmented deception plan.

Although we went through the motions throughout December of planning an amphibious assault, we focused most of our energy on other problems, especially when we started encountering the first drifting mines. The real surprise came in early January when we were told that the commander of Marine Forces Central Command (MARCENT), Lieutenant General Boomer, had made a last minute revision to his plan; he moved his planned main thrust into Kuwait further to the west, and determined that for it to work, he would need a real simultaneous supporting amphibious assault to occur somewhere around the Kuwaiti oil refinery or just south of Kuwait City.

My reaction to this news, to use my boss' frequent written shorthand expression, was, "YGTBSM!!" (You've got to be sh**ing me!!) We'd been deliberately advertising our intent to land on the Kuwaiti coast so as to draw the maximum numbers of Iraqi troops to the beaches, so that General Schwarzkopf's famous "Hail Mary!" flanking plan had a better chance of success, and now we were being ordered to plan to land right in the teeth of the defenses the Iraqis had been so obligingly setting up? This struck me as folly on the scale of the Peleliu landing. It also set off a mad scramble to resume serious planning.

NAVCENT set up a group called the "Naval Offensive Campaign Working Group," to plan the now "real" landing, and I was assigned to provide the intelligence support. This group included a number of officers who had augmented the staff just before *Blue Ridge* got underway a few days before the start of the Air Campaign. Most of the group were truly extraordinary officers; two that I remember by name were Commander Phil Balisle and Captain Gordon Holder, both of whom went

on to be three-star admirals. Despite this high-priced talent, there were some bizarre moments.

In one case, I remember an excruciatingly protracted discussion bogged down in minutia right after the start of the air war. The question concerned how soon we would have to start minesweeping operations in order to clear enough water space for the safe passage and operations by the amphibious ships and naval gunfire support ships. Our working assumption was that the ground campaign would start about one month after the start off the air campaign, which had just started. The minesweeping experts estimated it would take six weeks of sweeping to achieve the desired level of mine clearance. This estimate caused extensive discussion of the metrics for determining the level of confidence that all the mines in an area had been swept.

The minesweeper experts had the metrics, but they were completely incomprehensible to anyone outside the minehunting priesthood, and even they couldn't explain it so anyone else could understand. Does cleared to a 90 percent confidence level mean there is a 10 percent chance that a ship operating in that area will hit a mine? (It doesn't). How does the measure of risk increase the longer the ship operates in that area? The answers were gobbledygook.

After everyone's head began to pound, with no clear resolution, the discussion then shifted to meteorological/climatology conditions, trying to answer the question, "In a typical January/February in the Arabian Gulf, how many days of the month would the seas be too rough to conduct minesweeping operations?" Bad weather days would have to be added to the six-week minesweeping time estimate. This also led to interminable discussion over how accurate the climatology estimates were.

As the most junior person in the room, and not an "operator," I sat mentally scratching my head. I was a history major not a math major, but as I

made the mental calculations I quickly reached the conclusion that the whole discussion was pointless, thinking that, "Even if the weather were perfect, four weeks minus six weeks meant that we were already two weeks too late getting started, any weather delay would only make us even more late."

Once this dawned on the group, the discussion then shifted to, "What percentage of Iraqi threat systems needed to be destroyed in order to determine that the amphibious operating area would be safe enough for the ships to operate in?" This was especially critical since most of the minesweepers were Allied and not U.S., and the British in particular wanted assurance that the risk to their ships had been mitigated to an acceptable level.



A crewman aboard a minesweeper takes a bearing with a telescopic alidade. Four U.S. Navy minesweepers were deployed to the gulf in support of Operation Desert Shield. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921-2008)

At this point, I was directed by the working group leader to go research and put together a briefing for the next day that would describe the percentage of attrition on Iraqi threat systems so far and project when we would achieve 50 percent attrition. Having determined in my own mind that every day was now of the essence, I balked, "Sir, I can give you that brief right now, and you're not going to like it."

I then rattled off by memory the handful of Mirage F-1s that had been shot down to date, and then

listed all the Exocet-armed Mirage F-1s and Super Frelon helicopters, Silkworm-armed B-6D Badger bombers, shore-based Silkworm antiship missile batteries, and missile boats that had not even been targeted yet, let alone destroyed a week into the air campaign. I explained that none of these threat systems were being targeted during the "strategic" phase of the air campaign.

The working group, which consisted mostly of surface line officers, was stunned into silence, and then they comprehended why the aviators in our Strike Warfare Cell had been apoplectic about the Air Force's "Air Tasking Order" for weeks. As long as these threats remained in port or on the ground, they would not be struck.

I continued, "Attrition of the primary threat systems is less than 5 percent. At the present rate of attrition, it will be sometime next year before we reach 50 percent."

At first, the working group wanted to disbelieve these numbers. They couldn't believe the Air Force targeting strategy could be so insane. Every day's delay in destroying Iraqi threat systems would add to the delay in conducting minesweeping operations making it impossible to conduct an amphibious operation until well after the start of the ground campaign (at which point it would become moot), unless the Navy was prepared to accept a significantly higher level of risk to our ships. At first I was told to rework my numbers, but I stood my ground. The threats were simply not being addressed by the Air Force targeting strategy.

The working group then decided to deal with the threat dilemma by ignoring the issue and focusing instead on the details of the primary landing beach at Mina al-Ahmadi. They didn't like what I had to say about that, since by this time I had rounded up answers to most of the difficult esoteric questions raised several months earlier. The working group reached the conclusion that we would have to bomb and blow up the LNG

plant before the landing in order to prevent the Iraqis from doing so during the landing.

During the first briefing to Vice Admiral Arthur, the concept of deliberately setting off a multi-megaton explosion in the middle of the refinery that was the lifeblood of the Kuwaiti economy didn't go over well. The highlight (or lowlight) of the brief came when Captain Holder accused the N3 (ops officer), Captain "Bucky" Johnson, of administering a "face-shot" with some blistering criticism in front of the admiral.

We were sent back to the drawing board as Admiral Arthur decided that blowing up the refinery would not be an acceptable solution. By this time, we'd also received word that General Boomer had changed his plan again, and now an amphibious landing was absolutely critical. Meanwhile, no mines had been swept yet.

The working group then shifted focus to the next best beach further north. This plan required the battleships *Missouri* (BB-63) and *Wisconsin* (BB-64) to level the southern suburbs of Kuwait City, which by this time were heavily entrenched and fortified by the Iraqis in a densely populated urban area. There was also considerable risk that the greatly outnumbered Marine landing force might get trapped, because it might take longer to link up with the main Marine ground assault that would be coming across the Saudi border to the south and west. Nobody from the admiral on down liked this plan either, but we worked it out in considerable detail in concert with the planners afloat in the amphibious task force.

About three weeks (2021 Comment: 2 February) before the start of the ground offensive, General Schwarzkopf and Lieutenant General Boomer helicoptered out to *Blue Ridge*. General Schwarzkopf said practically nothing as General Boomer briefed his plan, and then we briefed our supporting plan. I recall that General Boomer seemed to suddenly waffle a bit about the "criticality" of the supporting amphibious

planning. Then General Schwarzkopf threw everyone out of the room except Admiral Arthur, General Boomer, and Brigadier General Sheehan (who had been sent by Headquarters Marine Corps a month earlier, presumably to make sure NAVCENT didn't do anything stupid with our assigned Marines).

The closed-door discussion went on for some time. When it was over, the amphibious landing was back to being a deception operation.

(2021 Comment: Although "Desert Saber" was a deception plan, to be effective, it still required U.S. ships to go into what we believed (and was) a heavily mined area. I believe it was VADM Arthur who said, "a feint still requires a feint," meaning the amphibious forces were still going to have to make it look like there was going to be a real landing for the deception to be effective, and this still required considerable risk).



Sailors gather at the bow of the aircraft carrier USS *John F. Kennedy* (CV-67) as the ship departs for the Persian Gulf in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921–2008)

Late January 1991. Central Arabian Gulf, Underway on USS *Blue Ridge*. "Air Campaign Follies."

I provoked a nasty radio call between Vice Admiral Arthur and Lieutenant General Horner, the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC), and I did it with malice aforethought. I

carefully selected three satellite images that we had received via our FIST (Fleet Imagery Support Terminal) system overnight, put them in a specific order, and gave them to my boss, Commander Perras, to show to Admiral Arthur at an early morning update.

The first image showed bomb damage from a coalition air strike on a rocket motor test stand at an Iraqi research facility. The second image showed bomb damage at a truck assembly facility. The third image showed a dozen Iraqi Mirage F-1 fighters, with Exocet antiship missiles uploaded, at al Jarrah airfield in southeastern Iraq, completely unscathed. In fact, the F-1s hadn't even been attacked despite sitting in the open for at least three days.

According to Commander Perras, Admiral Arthur went through the overhead when he saw the image of the F-1s, which was the intended effect. Admiral Arthur got on the radio to General Horner and wanted to know how long the Air Force was going to wait to do something about this highly dangerous threat to naval forces, or let our Navy aircraft handle it. General Horner's response was, "What F-1s out in the open?" The conversation became less civilized after that.

Within a few days of the start of the air campaign, I had become increasingly frustrated with the Air Force's targeting strategy, which under the new joint warfighting doctrinal concepts just recently coming into effect we were obliged to follow. I wasn't alone. The aviators in our strike planning cell were positively beside themselves. (LCDR Scott Shuman, an intelligence augmentee from U.S. Pacific Fleet, assumed full-time support for the NAVCENT Strike Cell, while I focused on the mines and amphibious planning.)

It seemed to me that the first order of business was to destroy those systems that represented a serious threat to our own forces. Once those threats had been beaten down, we could bomb "strategic" installations (which would have no

short-term effect on the conflict) to our heart's content and at our leisure. The Air Force's strategy appeared to be the exact opposite; they wanted to bomb strategic targets first, and clean up the threat systems later. They seemed bound and determined to prove that air power could win the war single-handedly by attacking Iraqi "command and control" and effectively decapitating Iraqi leadership, even if it put Navy and Army forces at greater risk from numerous threat systems that remained potentially dangerous well into the conflict.

The Air Force didn't want to attack "tactical" targets during the opening "strategic" phase of the air campaign. The problem, from our perspective, was that many of the tactical targets were mobile, "fleeting" targets; if they weren't attacked and destroyed as soon as they were located, they might go back into hiding and maintain the capability to pop back up by surprise in later phases of the campaign. In our view, the Air Force strategy required the enemy to cooperate and not attack us during the "wrong" phase of the campaign.

As each day went by, and key threat systems, like Mirage F-1's, B-6D Badger bombers, Silkworm coastal defense missile batteries, and Osa missile boats were located but not attacked, frustration on the NAVCENT staff mounted. Each day that went by and these threat systems were allowed to survive, the Navy was forced to hold back fighter and attack sorties to defend our ships instead of using them to contribute to the air campaign in Iraq. The sooner we dealt with the threats, the sooner we would be able to move the carriers in closer, which would reduce flight times, reduce the need for airborne refueling, increase bomb tonnage per sortie, and increase sortie generation rate.

Navy officers commented bitterly that the Air Force appeared to have some phobia about blowing up enemy aircraft on the ground. The most cynical observed that in order to become an

Ace, the enemy Air Force had to be allowed to get off the ground in order to be shot down.

It took an excruciatingly long time to destroy lingering remnants of the Iraqi air force and navy, but once Admiral Arthur became convinced we had sufficiently mitigated the threats to ships, he directed the carrier *America (CV-66)* to steam around from the Red Sea to join the carriers *Midway*, *Ranger*, and *Theodore Roosevelt* in the Arabian Gulf, then directed all four to move further north.

With four carriers in this position, Navy jets only had to fly half the distance to Kuwait as the closest Air Force bases in Saudi Arabia, and were no longer dependent on scarce Air Force tankers, which had been the key limiting factor for Navy sortie generation rates in the early phase of the air campaign when the Navy could have flown more strikes if the Air Force could have supplied enough airborne refueling, which they couldn't. However, in the last week of the air campaign, Navy sortie generation and bomb tonnage dropped increased dramatically. During this last phase, which consisted of softening up Iraqi ground forces in "kill boxes" in Kuwait in preparation for the Coalition ground offensive, Navy carrier strike aircraft were dropping as much bomb tonnage on Iraqi tanks and troops as the B-52s, and far more than Air Force tactical jets. Navy jets played a key role in the final air attacks that broke the will of the Iraqi army to resist.

(2021 Comment: Due to JFACC (i.e., Air Force) tanking priorities, only two of the three carriers in the Red Sea at a time were allocated the tanking necessary to reach Iraq from the Red Sea. Having denied one carrier the necessary tanking, and because USN aircraft in a fleet defense role were not initially counted in the ATO, the USAF then would use the "strike sortie per offensive aircraft in theater" to "prove" the USAF sortie generation was much more effective than the USN. In another example of these "follies," the USAF would bomb targets that had just been hit by USN TLAMs

before the next overhead imagery pass making it very difficult to tell whether the damaged had been caused by the TLAM or the subsequent USAF bomb. There was a distinct impression that the USAF was annoyed by all the positive press the TLAMS were getting, especially since the JFACC Commander didn't want to include TLAMs in the ATO to begin with (see H-Gram 056).

26 January 1991. Central Arabian Gulf, Underway on USS Blue Ridge. "Runaway Air Force."

It was the most unexpected and bizarre thing I could recall since the Jonestown massacre. The Iraqi air force was fleeing to Iran, their mortal enemy!

At first I didn't believe the reports. It wouldn't have been the first, or last, completely bogus operational report I'd heard during the war, plus, it made absolutely no sense. If true, there was no way the Iranians were ever going to give the planes back, so I couldn't see what Saddam (or whoever made the decision) thought they would gain. I could see perhaps a couple jets defecting, or a couple flying into Iranian airspace in a desperate attempt to avoid being shot down. But the whole air force?

Nevertheless, as reports continued to come in, it became obvious that numerous Iraqi jets, commercial and military, were making the dash to Iran, virtually all of them successfully. By the time U.S. fighters could get a shot at them, they were already crossing into Iranian airspace. Over the next two days, almost every Iraqi aircraft that could still fly fled to Iran. (2021 Comment: And smaller groups and singles would make the dash over the next two weeks.)

To this point, the Iraqi air force had not exactly covered itself in glory. Within the first couple days, it became clear that the Iraqi air force was a far cry from the air force that had bombed Iranian power plants as far as the Caspian Sea, and hit Iranian oil

storage and shuttle tankers in the Strait of Hormuz. In the first several days of the war, only a handful of Iraqi fighters made it airborne. All but the Foxbat that might have engaged Lieutenant Commander Speicher's F/A-18 on the first night were promptly shot down, almost all by U.S. Air Force fighters. Navy fighters only bagged two older MIG-21s and a helicopter in air-to-air action. There was suspicion among Navy pilots that the Air Force controllers aboard the E-3A AWACS, who were controlling all aircraft under the new joint rules, were favoring Air Force fighters for intercepts of Iraqi aircraft. This may have been true, but the reality is that hardly any Iraqi aircraft chose to get off the ground (at least to fight).



Aviation ordnancemen conduct a final pre-launch check on the ordnance mounted on a Fighter Squadron 154 (VF-154) F-14A Tomcat aircraft aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Independence* (CV-62). (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921-2008)

Of note, however, the Joint Force Air Component Commander (Lieutenant General Horner) forbid the U.S. Navy from using our long-rang AIM-54 Phoenix air-to-air missiles out of fear we would accidentally shoot down friendly aircraft. Only USAF F-15s were allowed to use a BVR (beyond-visual-range) missile. In my opinion, one of our F-14s was most likely shot down by an F-15. Although the F-14 was officially listed as being downed by an Iraqi surface-to-air missile, there were no SAM batteries in that area. (2021 Comment: I've seen no one else reach this conclusion. Although during the later Southern Watch operations the Iraqis got much better at

rapidly moving surface-to-air missile sites, during Desert Storm, Iraqi SAM sites remained pretty stationary, especially the SA-2 and SA-3 batteries, and my plots showed no Iraqi SAMs in range of where the F-14 was shot down. Or, I received garbled coordinates on the location of the shutdown, which wasn't uncommon with messages at the time).

But back to the Iraqi air force... When the Iraqi air "offensive" finally came, it was pathetic, although it started off well for the Iraqis. Two Mirage F-1s, probably armed with Exocet antiship missiles, launched from al Jarrah Airfield (see "Air Campaign Follies") on 24 January and flew across southern Iraq through the USAF area of responsibility without being intercepted. The two F-1s flew out of Iraq and down the Kuwaiti Coast, on a classic anti-ship strike profile, except closer to the coast, splitting the dividing line between Air Force and Navy Air Defense Zones, resulting in coordination confusion. As Navy fighters and ships lined up to take a shot the instant the F-1s might turn into the Navy zone, the Air Force AWACS controllers worked under the direction of the JFACC to maneuver Saudi F-15s in for the kill, apparently putting politics and public relations first. As the F-1s continued down the coast, they could have turned left at any moment and have immediately been within Exocet range of numerous U.S. Navy ships, many packed with Marines and critical logistics supplies. (2021 Comment: U.S. ships and fighter aircraft were having great difficulty tracking and locating the F-1s as they made their dash, in large part due to the problem of land/sea interface interference with radar. Also, at the time, the AWACS was not prepared to control USN fighters across an Air Defense Zone boundary).

Fortunately, the Iraqis proved to be even more incompetent than we were. Flying relatively slowly, straight, and level, with no attempt at evasive maneuvers, the Iraqi pilots seemed to be begging to be shot down. After what seemed like an interminable time, one of the Saudi F-15s

finally got in position and obliged them both. From the Navy perspective, both these F-1s should have been blown up on the ground in the opening days of the war.



Various ships of the Saudi Arabian navy are docked at base during Operation Desert Shield. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921-2008)

After this incident, the U.S. Air Force finally started to get serious about destroying Iraqi aircraft on the ground, using a new weapon that the Navy did not have, the I-2000 laser-guided 2,000-pound bomb that could penetrate the Iraqis' hardened aircraft shelters (HAS). A HAS was a steel reinforced concrete bunker that could both hide and protect Iraqi jets from conventional bomb blast damage, but not from an I-2000. My favorite bomb damage assessment (BDA) report of the war described a successful I-2000 strike on a HAS and was eloquent in its simplicity, "Hole in roof. Blast doors on taxi-way."

The arrival of most of the Iraqi air force in Iran provoked wild speculation about the intent of both Iraq and Iran. There was serious concern by senior members of the Naval Offensive Campaign Working Group that the Iraqis and Iranians were in cahoots and that Iraqi aircraft would take off from airfields in Iran and strike us from the "east" flank. I considered this to be highly improbable, but then, so was the Iraqi air force flying to Iran in the first place.

I argued that the most likely explanation was that it was an act of desperation by Saddam Hussein to save his coveted air force from certain destruction. It was readily apparent in the first days of the war that any Iraqi aircraft that dared to fly in combat was going to be shot down, and once the U.S. Air Force finally started to destroy the Iraqi aircraft shelters, Saddam knew that it was just a matter of time before his planes would all be destroyed on the ground. By flying his aircraft to Iran, Saddam was essentially allowing the Iraqi air force to be interned in a neutral country for the duration of the conflict with the hope he could negotiate their return at a later date. Given the hatred between Iran and Iraq, this was a long shot, which is why I assessed it as a desperation move. I considered there to be no chance that the Iranians would allow the Iraqis to fly strikes on U.S. forces from Iranian airfields. The Iranians, still exhausted from the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, were perfectly content to sit this one out and let the Great Satan pound on their arch-enemy, Saddam Hussein. Although the Iranians had no love for us, it was the Iraqis that invaded Iran, launched missiles that terrorized civilian populations in Iranian cities, initiated the use of poison gas, and killed several hundred thousand Iranian soldiers and civilians. That kind of hatred is hard to dissipate in only three years.

Nevertheless, because I could not guarantee with 100 percent certainty that Iraqi aircraft would not launch strikes from Iran, we held back additional fighter aircraft to guard against what I believed to be a very remote possibility, aircraft that could have been better used bombing targets in Iraq and Kuwait in preparation for the impending ground campaign. So in effect, the flight of Iraqi aircraft to Iran served a useful purpose, diverting U.S. Navy aircraft from dropping more bombs on Republican Guard tanks. Had the Iraqi air force been attacked and destroyed at the start of the war, this bizarre event would not have been a problem.

After a time, Admiral Arthur became convinced that the Iraqi aircraft in Iran no longer posed a serious threat, at which point he ordered U.S. carriers to move further north in the Arabian Gulf, dramatically increasing the tonnage of bombs that Navy aircraft could drop on Iraqi ground forces in Kuwait. As it turned out, the Iranians immediately confiscated the Iraqi aircraft and never returned them, and even eventually incorporated some into the Iranian air force.

29-31 January 1991. Central Arabian Gulf, Underway on USS Blue Ridge. "Runaway Navy."

We called it, "The Battle of Bubiyan Island." It was more like shooting fish in a barrel. Nevertheless, although most of the Iraqi air force planes that made the attempt to flee to Iran succeeded (over one hundred thirty aircraft), most of the Iraqi navy was destroyed while attempting to do the same. Only three Iraqi ships made it to Iran. One damaged Polnocny LSM (medium landing ship), one damaged Osa I PTG (missile patrol boat), and one damaged Bogomol PG (patrol boat) survived the hail of Sea Skua missiles and bombs from a gauntlet U.S., British, and Canadian jets and helicopters. Many of the Iraqi ships were sunk more than once, attacked so many times by so many aircraft that sinking ships were hit again before they went down, resulting in inflated claims.

The Iraqi navy didn't cover itself in glory during Desert Storm either. Although the Iraqis captured all but two of Kuwait's relatively formidable Exocet-armed TNC-45 and FPB-57 missile patrol boats, the Iraqis never succeeded in doing more with them than being able to get them underway.

None of the Iraqi or captured Kuwaiti missile boats ever came out for a fight, instead spending the war shuffling from berth to berth within Iraqi and Kuwaiti ports to make air attack more difficult. With the exception of the minelayers and the smaller patrol boats, the Iraqi navy stayed in port, where the more significant vessels were picked off

one-by-one by U.S. Navy airstrikes, until those that remained operational attempted to flee en masse to safety in Iran, only to be massacred on the way. Virtually the entire Kuwaiti navy was actually sunk by the U.S. and British navies during the Battle of Bubiyan Island as the Iraqis tried to sail their "prizes" to Iran.

Keeping track of what was happening to the Iraqi navy during the war was yet another exercise in extraordinary frustration. The "official" U.S. Navy tally of Iraqi losses (over 107 ships and patrol boats) is ludicrous. Counting the captured Kuwaiti vessels, the Iraqis only had two "ships" (one T-43 Minesweeper and the training frigate *Ibn Khaldoon* (not the same as the "Peace Ship")), thirteen missile boats, and only about twenty other vessels that merited the term "patrol" boats.

Distinguishing between the different varieties of Iraqi patrol and missile boats was tough. U.S. aviators had a really hard time. Anything that looked like a larger patrol/missile boat was identified and reported as an "Osa" (This included Osa Is, Osa IIs, Bogomols, PB-90s, PB-80s and the captured Kuwaiti FPB-57 and TNC-45s). Anything that wasn't an "Osa" was identified and reported as a "Zhuk." (This included actual Zhuks, as well as Bogomols, PB-90s, PB-80s, Swaryys, a wide variety of small Iraqi patrol and yard craft, and commandeered Kuwaiti pleasure boats).

The saga of the Iraqi T-43 Minesweeper (which the Iraqis used as one of their two primary minelayers) is illustrative. On 22 January, U.S. Navy aircraft caught the T-43 out of port in the Khor al Amaya channel between the Kuwaiti island of Bubiyan and the Iraqi al Faw Peninsula. The Navy jets promptly bombed and sank the T-43. A couple days later, Navy jets bombed and sank a second T-43 in the same rough vicinity. I saw this as a problem, since the Iraqis only had one T-43. The "official" CENTCOM order-of-battle said they had two, but like the Osa boats described earlier (see H-gram 053), the Naval Operational Intelligence center had gone over

old reports and proven that one of the two T-43s had actually been sunk by the Iranians during the 1980s. This, however, did not keep the *Ranger* carrier group from claiming to have sunk a second T-43. (2021 Comment: as *Ranger* arrived just as Desert Storm started, and given how many messages (especially multi-section messages like orders of battle) never made it through the communications logjam) it is entirely possible *Ranger* didn't have this info).

A couple days later, U.S. Navy aircraft reported sinking the Iraqi training frigate in the same general vicinity as the T-43s. Since the training frigate had not moved from the exact same pier position in the port of Khor al Zubayr in over a decade, I found this report implausible. (The training frigate was eventually bombed, in its usual pier position, and badly damaged later in Desert Storm, and was finally bombed and sunk, in its usual pier position, during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003). But I finally obtained a photo of the "second" T-43 taken just before it was "sunk" that solved the mystery. It was a T-43 all right, but it had already been bombed and sunk. The picture, taken at low tide, showed the T-43 resting upright on the mud flats, screws and rudder plainly visible, a burned out hulk from a recent previous attack (the one on the "first" T-43). The attack on the "training frigate" was actually a third attempt to bomb the sunken T-43 even further into the mud.

Several days later, an "S.O.1" patrol boat was reported bombed and sunk in the same location as the T-43 hulk. Since the S.O.1s had been trapped up in Basra since the beginning of the Iran/Iraq war in 1981, I figured they'd bombed the sunken T-43 yet again and were becoming more creative, or more desperate, to avoid reaching the conclusion they were bombing the same ship over and over again. In fact, a T-43 with its superstructure blasted nearly clean off would vaguely resemble the silhouette (but not the size) of an S.O.1. The picture of the T-43 resting in the mud is still hanging in my office. (2021 Comment:

I also have a photo hanging in my office, signed by VADM Arthur, of captured Kuwaiti FPB-57 Sabhan blasted and burning but still stubbornly afloat after about three separate air strikes).

Most of the reported "kills" on Iraqi "Zhuks" and "patrol boats" were actually commandeered Kuwaiti speedboats, usually manned by three or four hapless Iraqis. (2021 Comment: some of these boats had shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles, so attacking them was not without risk). These boats were notoriously hard to hit by bombs dropped from high-speed jet aircraft. The Iraqis quickly learned to wait until the bombs came off the aircraft, then immediately turn at a right angle to the track of the attacking aircraft (and bombs), which would almost always guarantee a miss. This didn't keep the U.S. Navy from claiming to have sunk scores of these "patrol boats," but in reality, many of them got away. Helos armed with guns were much more effective, but very few U.S. helos were armed. The British Lynx-helos, armed with machine guns and Sea Skua missiles, were by far the best platform for this kind of close quarters naval warfare.



A Royal Navy Lynx helicopter takes off from the flight deck of the British frigate HMS *Brazen* (F 91) during Operation Desert Shield. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921-2008)

The campaign against the Iraqi navy led to significant animosity between NAVCENT and the U.S. Air Force Air Component commander, who was in charge of the air campaign, and who made up the rules. In my view, we could have, and

should have, wiped out the entire Iraqi (and captured Kuwaiti) missile boat threat on the first night of Desert Storm, but we weren't allowed to do so by the Air Force.

By the rules of the infamous ATO (Air Tasking Order) process, we were permitted to attack any Iraqi naval vessels that were underway. Unfortunately, the Iraqi navy wouldn't play by our rules and stayed in port. In order to attack a port, we had to ask the Air Force to put the mission onto the ATO. However, the Air Force viewed ships and missile boats (as well as tanks and jets on the ground) as "tactical" targets, which were not a priority during the initial "strategic" phase of the air campaign. So instead of destroying the Iraqi missile boats in port, Navy aircraft were tasked by the Air Force to provide "Suppression of Enemy Air Defense" missions for Air Force strikes against Iraqi research and development facilities and truck assembly plants, or to waste flight hours flying aimlessly over western Iraq in the unlikely event an Iraqi mobile ballistic missile launcher stayed put long enough to be attacked. (The Air Force then proceeded to count these Navy missions, that they tasked us to do, as "support" missions (the same category as tankers and cargo aircraft) instead of as strike missions.)

Almost all the Iraqi missile boats that were sunk were attacked by Navy aircraft that for some reason couldn't get to their primary ATO-tasked target and bombed the missile boats as an "alternate" target on the way back to the carrier. In fact, the largest U.S. Navy strike against Iraqi ships in port was willfully planned as a deliberate "abort" from the primary Air Force-assigned target. The plan called for picking an ATO-assigned target that we thought was of minimal military significance, deliberately loading the wrong ordnance (but the right kind for bombing ships), deliberately flying to the primary target and deliberately declaring we couldn't find it, and then bombing Iraqi naval vessels in the ports of Umm Qasr and Khor az Zubayr as "divert" alternate targets. This air strike, which was

hampered by poor visibility, nevertheless convinced the Iraqi navy to flee to Iran and the massacre off Bubiyan Island.

It didn't take long before the Air Force was convinced the Navy was willfully insubordinate and not team players. Likewise, we were convinced the Air Force was willfully ignorant of what we needed to do neutralize the threat to our ships, which would enable us to maximize our contribution to the air campaign.

Coming in Desert Storm Part 2 - February/March 1991

- The Great Scud Hunt
- Mine Warfare
- Over the Top
- Silkworm Shot
- The Highway of Death
- Vision of Hell

Source: Me. Although I wrote these pieces by memory a number of years after the fact, the best pretty comprehensive source for information on the U.S. Navy during Desert Shield/Desert Storm is still the two-volume set of *Desert Shield at Sea: What the Navy Really Did* and *Desert Storm at Sea: What the Navy Really Did* both by Marvin Pokrant (the NAVCENT/C7F CNA Rep during both operations): Greenwood Press, 1999. (It wasn't cheap). Also useful is the Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *The United States Navy in Desert Shield, Desert Storm* of 15 May 1991 which has the best chronology and other facts and figures. I would note that these are more "PC" than my account. Also, *Shield and Storm: The United States Navy in the Persian Gulf War*, by Edward J. Marolda and Robert J. Schneller: Naval Historical Center, 1998.



U.S. troops prepare to disembark from USS *LSU-1317* at Charley Pier, near Inchon's Tidal Basin, 29 December 1950. Wolmi-Do island is in the background, with Sowolmi-Do island in the left distance. Photographer: AF3 F.O. Furuichi. Note cold weather clothing worn by these men. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, from the collections of the Naval History and Heritage Command. (NH 97079)

H-058-2: Korean War: Communist Chinese Offensive Phase 3 – December 1950– January 1951

H-058.2

*Samuel J. Cox, Director, Naval History and Heritage
Command*

January 2021

Situation in Korea, Late December 1950

The Communist Chinese continued their massive offensive in North Korea in December 1950. In the east, the U.S. Marines conducted their heroic fighting retreat from Chosin Reservoir to

Hungnam on the east coast of North Korea. Greatly aided by U.S. Navy close air support from the Fast Carrier Task Force (TF-77) operating in the Sea of Japan, as well as by Marine aircraft from escort carriers and ashore, the Marines inflicted such severe casualties on the Chinese that the Chinese were unable to press the attack against Hungnam until after U.S. Navy forces had evacuated the Marines and the rest of the U.S. Army X Corps and Republic of Korea I Corps. The evacuation was complete by Christmas 1950. (See H-Gram 056.)

The Chinese offensive in the west was even more successful—for the Chinese. Suffering heavy casualties in the Battle of Ch'ongch'on River (25 November–2 December), the U.S. 8th Army and

other UN forces narrowly escaped being surrounded and cut off by the Chinese. In what became known as the "Big Bug Out," the 8th Army essentially retreated faster than the Chinese army could keep up, abandoning much equipment in the process. Morale and combat effectiveness in many 8th Army units was shattered. The Chinese advance was so overwhelming that General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of United Nations and U.S. forces in Korea, seriously considered using atomic weapons on the Chinese or completely evacuating the Korean peninsula. What many viewed as an ignominious retreat finally stabilized for a time in late December along the 38th Parallel, the original dividing line between North and South Korea.

On 23 December, the 8th Army commander, Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, was killed when his jeep was hit by an oncoming South Korean weapons carrier. On 26 December, Lieutenant General Mathew Ridgeway assumed command of the 8th Army. The highly effective commander of the 82nd Airborne Division and XVIII Airborne Corps in World War II, Ridgeway would be rightly credited with turning around the sense of defeatism in the 8th Army, but not until after several more defeats.

In late December, the United Nations proposed a truce. Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung, convinced that Chinese troops were invincible after their stunning successes, interpreted the UN offer as a sign of weakness. Against the advice of his senior military commanders, who argued that Chinese logistics lines were already over-extended, Mao ordered another major attack, known as the Chinese Third Phase Offensive or the Chinese New Year's offensive. Commencing on New Year's Eve 1950, Chinese forces overran South Korean units on the 38th Parallel, causing the 8th Army to evacuate the South Korean capital of Seoul, which fell to the Chinese on 4 January 1951, the third time in the war that Seoul changed hands. The Chinese attack ran out of steam, partly due to

continuing air attacks, and Ridgeway rallied his forces and was able to stabilize the battle line near Suwon, about 19 miles south of Seoul. The Chinese advance along the east coast road also stalled out, due to outrunning their supply lines, which were under constant attack by U.S. Navy carrier aircraft and naval gunfire from ships along the coast.



Soviet MiG-15 Jet Fighter photographed during an air battle in which a MiG-15 was shot down over North Korea by F9F-2 Panther fighters from USS *Leyte* (CV-32). Photograph is dated 23 November 1950. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-424090)

USS McKean Sinks Soviet Sub? - 18 December 1950

Given the enormous number of confirmed Soviet mines provided to the North Koreans, as well as Russian pilots flying "North Korean" Mig-15s (see H-Gram 056), there was considerable concern among U.S. Navy commanders in the Far East that Soviet submarines were a serious potential threat, especially given the lack of escort ships necessary to adequately protect the long and potentially vulnerable sea lanes across the Pacific. As a result, U.S. Navy rules of engagement permitted immediate attack on any unknown submarine contacts in the vicinity of U.S. forces, and on 23 September 1950, the destroyer *McKean* (DD-784) had dropped five depth charges on a submerged contact, but with no sign a submarine had been hit. The U.S. estimated that the Soviets had as many as 80 submarines in Vladivostok, on

the Sea of Japan. Russian sources claim that only about ten submarines were in operational readiness condition.

On 12 December 1950, the first U.S. dedicated ASW Hunter-Killer Group (TG 96.7) in the Korean theater was stood up, in accordance with Commander Naval Forces Far East (CNFE) Order 24-50. TG 96.7 was formed around escort carrier *Bairoko* (CVE-115), which had arrived in the Korean theater in November after re-commissioning in September. Destroyer Division 32 (DESDIV 32) provided the destroyers and Task Group 96.9 provided submarines to serve as practice targets.

On 18 December 1950, destroyer *McKean* sank a Soviet submarine off Sasebo, Japan, according to a number of accounts, including the book *Blind Man's Bluff* and Wikipedia. I will start with the official accounts, which include the originally top secret report by the commanding officer of *McKean*, "Report of Sonar Contact and Attacks by USS *McKean* and USS *Frank Knox* (DD-742) on a Hulk off Sasebo," Serial 0001, dated 5 January 1951, as well as the assessment by Commander Destroyer Flotilla ONE, Task Force 95, Commander Naval Forces Far East and Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet.

According to *McKean's* official report, at 1036 India (local), 18 December 1950, *McKean* was steaming independently en route a gunnery exercise area off Sasebo when she gained a sonar contact bearing 270(T) at 1,500 yards. The *McKean's* experienced ASW officer evaluated the contact as a possible sub based on bright visual echo, sharp audible echo, and high Doppler, on course 145(T) at 7 knots. The target depth was estimated at 150-240 feet at position 3326.2N 12917.0E. The commanding officer (Commander J. C. Weatherwax) was called to the bridge and immediately directed the ship go to General Quarters.

A tractor aircraft for an anti-aircraft gunnery exercise reported a possible silhouette in the general location of the sonar contact. The contact information was passed to the Officer in Tactical Command (OTC), the commanding officer of destroyer *Frank Knox* (DDR-742), who ordered an urgent attack. *McKean* conducted an attack with an eleven depth charge pattern. The aircraft reported that the silhouette was at center of the pattern, after which the silhouette disappeared and was not sighted again. The aircraft then reported air bubbles and an oil slick, which grew larger. The oil slick was sighted by both *McKean* and *Frank Knox*, which joined 20 minutes after the first attack. *McKean* held contact and vectored *Frank Knox* onto the contact. *Frank Knox* obtained contact and concurred in *McKean's* evaluation.

The contact plotted dead-in-the-water for 25 minutes, but as *Frank Knox* made a close approach the contact tracked 025(T) at 3 knots. *Frank Knox* made an attack and then *McKean* made a second depth charge attack, but missed as the contact was in a hard left turn. Confusing the picture, during *McKean's* first attack, an additional contact was noted 200 yards inside the first, which then merged with the first contact.

After *McKean's* second attack, the contact remained dead-in-the-water. *McKean* and *Frank Knox* alternated attacks. After *McKean's* fourth attack, noises were heard from the direction of the contact evaluated as sonar countermeasures. At about the same time, the aircraft overhead reported a possible torpedo wake. Both ships took evasive action and *Frank Knox* reported crossing the wake. The wake was visible on the QHB-a (sonar) scope, with a humming noise in the direction of the countermeasures. After evading the possible torpedo, *McKean* made a fifth attack, after which both *McKean* and *Frank Knox* lost contact due to the countermeasure jamming. The jamming gradually decreased and the target was

regained in the same location, still dead-in-the-water.

By this time, both *McKean* and *Frank Knox* had expended all but three depth charges each. The two ships then alternated "heckler runs" at irregular intervals, dropping one depth charge on each run with no further movement detected. At 1712 local, 18 December, destroyer *Taussig* (DD-746) arrived on scene and *McKean* was ordered back to Sasebo for a reload of depth charges. *McKean* returned the next morning and made three more attacks on the contact, which plotted dead-in-the-water in the same location. (From other reporting, probably accurate, *McKean* expended 55 depth charges on the first day, received a reload of 94 from destroyer tender *Dixie* (AD-14), and expended 33 more on the second day.)

On 20 December, the salvage and rescue ship *USS Greenlet* (ASR-10) arrived, moored over the contact and put a hard-hat diver over the side. The diver reported that the target was a hulk with *Iona Maru* on stern. *Iona Maru* had reportedly capsized and sunk on 10 December 1950. *McKean's* report stated that the sonar jamming was possibly caused by an unexploded Mk. 14 Mod 0 depth charge employed in the fourth attack. (Mk. 14 was an acoustic depth charge developed during WW2, but too late to be used in action.)

On 19 December 1950, Rear Admiral Kenmore M. McManes (Navy Cross, Battle of Surigao Strait), Commander of Destroyer Flotilla ONE, sent a report evaluating the contact. (COMDESFLOT 1, Serial 0005, 19 December 1950, "Evaluation of Submarine Contact of *USS McKean* which was Held and Developed by *USS Frank Knox*, *Endicott* (DMS-35), and *USS Taussig* on Probable Submarine.") In addition to *McKean* and *Frank Knox*, the destroyer *Taussig* and destroyer-minesweeper *Endicott* had also attacked the contact overnight 18-19 December. McManes' report included the reporting data from the ships

and concluded the contact was a "probable sub." The "contact was a moving object and that the noises, changes in frequency of these noises, etc., indicated on the tracings, were being manipulated from a moving target which was, more than likely, a submarine. However on the other side of the picture there are no positive indications other than the mechanical ones described above such as floating debris, heavy oil slick, etc. which definitely proves the contact to be a submarine." After his signature, RADM McManes added "P.S. I have not forgotten the 'Battle of the Pips'." (this is a reference to an incident during the Aleutian Islands campaign in July 1943 when U.S. battleships fired over 500 rounds at radar contacts which were probably flocks of birds. See H-Gram 016.) In pen on the report is "final evaluation sunken Jap ship *Tom Maru*."

The Commander, UN Blockading and Escort Force (CTF 95) forwarded *McKean's* report without comment as did Commander Naval Forces Far East. Commander-in-Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet forwarded *McKean's* report to the Chief of Naval Operations on 22 March 1951, signed out by the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Captain Edwin T. Layton, with the statement "CPF eval is non-submarine." All these messages were originally classified as top secret due to the sensitivity of attacking a Soviet submarine. (Layton, Intelligence hero of the Battle of Midway, had been a captain since 1943, and would not be promoted to rear admiral until 1953, which sounds slow, although he did go from lieutenant commander to captain in two years.)

In 1998, the book *Blind Man's Bluff: The Untold Story of American Submarine Espionage*, was published, including a short passage sourced to two anonymous former intelligence officers that "U.S. Intelligence officials had long believed a U.S. surface ship sank a Soviet submarine that came close to a U.S. carrier force" early in the Korean War. This was followed by multiple accounts claiming *McKean* sank a Soviet submarine.

According to the Wikipedia account, the *McKean* (call sign "Rancher") had just left Sasebo to rejoin the Fast Carrier Task Force (TF-77) when she gained hard sonar returns on two submerged contacts. Commander Weatherwax, who had been a submarine officer in WWII, ordered the attack. *McKean* first sent the international "identify yourself" code (dot dash - letter A) via sonar three times, which was not answered. *McKean* then attacked the submarine with depth-charges. Commander Weatherwax ordered the word "submarine" struck from the log as that would cause an international incident.

The Wikipedia account then tracks closely with *McKean's* official version. However, on the second day (19 December) one of the three aircraft overhead reported a torpedo track, which just missed astern of *McKean* without being seen by *McKean*. This was "the other Russian submarine lashing back." USS *Greenlet* arrived on the scene and a hard hat diver was lowered and came up with a pair of "new" binoculars. The account then speculates that *Greenlet* retrieved a "black box" that was the Soviet sonar jammer and possibly code books. *Greenlet* was then immediately sent to Pearl Harbor and not allowed to return to Korea because her crew knew too much about Soviet secrets. (*Greenlet* did depart Yokosuka on 6 January 1951 for Pearl Harbor and remained there for the duration of the war.) Although every "B-girl" in Sasebo supposedly knew what happened, *McKean's* crew couldn't talk because they were required to sign secrecy letters, and were informed that the contact was *Iona Maru*. The account then states, "the Navy brass had already formulated their cover story with the skipper of the *Greenlet*." Crewmen on *McKean* were reportedly incredulous, "We sunk a hulk ship that was doing 5 knots!"

The Russians have only ever admitted to losing one submarine in the Far East in the early 1950s, the M-type S-117 (C-117 in Russian) that went missing in December 1952 due to unknown causes; all others are accounted for, at least

officially. No other Russian account has surfaced admitting to losing a submarine in December 1950, or any time, as a result of the Korean War. In fact, those Russian accounts that I can find state that no Russian submarines operated in vicinity of U.S. carrier or surface forces. This would actually be consistent with Soviet rules of engagement during the war, which was to hide the extent of their involvement as much as possible. For example, the Russian pilots flying "North Korean" Mig-15s were forbidden from operating over UN controlled territory, or overwater, for fear a Russian pilot might get captured. The sea mines had the element of "plausible deniability," which evidence of a sunken submarine would not. The Russians were likely aware of U.S. rules of engagement and had no desire to get one of their submarines sunk for no real purpose. The best Russian source I found was Russian-language, "Korean War. Episodes of the Participation of the Soviet Navy", by Alexander Rozin (at alerozin.narod.ru/Korea45x53.htm), and the "translate this article" function worked surprisingly well.

There are some lessons from this event. The first is that anti-submarine warfare is really, really hard, even for a crew assessed as well-trained and experienced as the *McKean's*. Also, underwater acoustics are really freaky. Third, in any conflict involving submarines, expenditure of ASW weapons on whales and other sea creatures is prodigious and likely to be a serious problem (as the British re-learned in the 1982 Falklands War). Fourth, *Blind Man's Bluff* is a really interesting book, but don't believe everything. Fourth, Wikipedia is a very useful tool, but don't believe everything there either. Maybe *McKean* sank a Soviet sub and Russian and U.S. official sources are all lying, but probably not. See, isn't history fun?



Port facilities at Inchon, South Korea, are destroyed as UN forces evacuate the city in the face of the Chinese Communist advance. Photograph is dated 4 January 1951. The final evacuation of Inchon took place on 5 January. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-425472)

Evacuation of Inchon - January 1951

In anticipation of continued Chinese offensive action in western South Korea, the escort carriers *Sicily* and *Badoeng Strait*, with Marine aircraft embarked, entered the Yellow Sea and relieved British carrier *Theseus* on 27 December 1950 providing support to the U.S. 8th Army. Two days later, heavy cruiser *Rochester* (CA-124), with RADM Roscoe H. Hillenkoeter embarked as Commander Task Element CTE 90.12, arrived at Inchon to join with HMS *Ceylon* and Australian destroyers HMAS *Warramunga* and *Bataan* to cover UN forces at Inchon. Two days after that, the "Third Phase" Chinese offensive commenced on New Year's Eve and 8th Army fell back to more defensible positions south the Seoul. The 8th Army plan was to fall back via road rather than by sea, but there was still considerable equipment and supplies to get out via Inchon. Nevertheless, U.S. Navy forces were waiting off Inchon with the capacity to evacuate 135,000 men if that became necessary.

The evacuation force was under the command of Rear Admiral Lyman A. Thackrey, Commander Amphibious Group THREE/Task Group 90.1. RADM Thackrey's assets included his

flagship *Eldorado* (AGC-11), one attack cargo ship (AKA), two attack transports (APA), two landing ship dock (LSD), one fast transport (APD), two U.S. Navy LSTs, and nine Japanese-manned (Scajap) LSTs. In addition 15 Victory Ship transports were being held in reserve in Japan. As it turned out, the U.S. ships took out 69,000 military personnel, more than 1,300 vehicles, plus over 60,000 tons of cargo, plus 64,200 Korean nationals.

On 5 January 1951, RADM Thackrey sortied all his ships as the Chinese approached and the Inchon port facilities were blown. This demolition would prove somewhat short-sighted given UN control of the sea around the Korean Peninsula—the Chinese weren't going to be able to use the port anyway, and this left Pusan as the only high-capacity port on the Korean Peninsula. RADM Thackrey's ships completed the move of U.S. Army and UN units from Inchon to Taechon, further down the west coast of South Korea, between 7 and 12 January 1951. Taechon was a relatively undeveloped port that required considerable innovation and support from the ships in order to be useable.

On 7 January, the light carrier *Bataan* (CVL-29), with Navy aircraft, joined escort carriers *Sicily* (CVE-118) and *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116) in the Yellow Sea striking Chinese troop concentrations and supply lines. *Rochester* (CA-124) and HMS *Kenya* and HMS *Ceylon* bombarded Chinese positions on the west coast. On the east coast, carriers *Philippine Sea* (CV-47) and *Leyte* (CV-32) joined *Valley Forge* (CV-45) in striking advancing Chinese forces, while *Princeton* (CV-37) came off line to Sasebo for upkeep. Foul weather and high winds adversely affected the carrier strikes, which nonetheless continued in brutally cold temperatures.

From 6-10 January, heavy snow precluded all carrier strikes, and on 10 January the weather was so bad that all land-based aircraft on the entire Korean peninsula were grounded. The U.S. Air Force had already been forced out of the airfields

near Seoul by the Chinese advance. The Chinese took advantage of the weather to press their offensive in the central area of South Korea. The 1st Marine Division, which had been held in reserve after being evacuated from Hungnam, was once again thrown into the breach to stop the Chinese advance, aided by clearing weather and heavy carrier strikes on 11 January.

Nevertheless, the situation was once again perceived to be so dire that General MacArthur assessed that without massive reinforcement and expansion of the war (into China) the Korean Peninsula could not be held and that UN forces should be evacuated. The Joint Chiefs of Staff reluctantly accepted MacArthur's view that a protracted defense of the Korean Peninsula was not feasible. The United Nations once again proposed a cease-fire, but the emboldened Chinese only upped the ante, demanding admission to the United Nations (in place of the Nationalist Chinese on Formosa) and that commencement of negotiations on Korea precede any cease-fire.

However, at this critical juncture, the Chinese had outrun their supply lines. On 16 January, a reconnaissance in force by General Ridgeway's forces met surprisingly little resistance, and by 25 January the 8th Army was advancing all the way to the Han River (although Seoul was not recaptured until mid-March). In the next months, the front largely stabilized near the 38th Parallel and although there would be a number of bloody pitched battles there would be little in the way of significant movement of the front for the duration of the war.



Thorin, D.W., APC, prepares to take off in his helicopter with another load of survivors from the Thailand corvette, the HMTS *Prasae*, which ran aground during a blinding snow storm off the coast of Korea. Other members of the helicopters stand guard as the rescue was affected behind enemy lines. (NH 97164)

Loss of HTMS Prasae - January 1951

Thailand was the first Asian nation to join the United Nations coalition for the defense of South Korea and sent two frigates to participate, HTMS (His Thai Majesty's Ship) *Prasae* and her sister ship HTMS *Bangpakong*, which arrived in early November 1950. *Prasae* was a British *Flower*-class corvette (1 x 4-inch gun) completed in 1945, serving briefly with the Royal Indian Navy as HMIS *Sind*, before being returned to the British in 1946 and sold to Thailand in 1947. In January 1951, *Prasae* and *Bangpakong* were participating with the East Coast Blockading and Patrol Task Group (TG 95.2) shelling targets on the east coast of Korea near the 38th Parallel, then about 65 miles behind Chinese forward lines.

On 7 January 1951, blinded by a heavy snowstorm, *Prasae* suffered a radar equipment malfunction and ran hard aground on the beach. When the weather cleared somewhat, several U.S. ships took station in the vicinity to hold at bay any Chinese attempt to reach *Prasae* and suppressed distant enemy shelling. *Bangpakong* approached as closely as possible and tried to send eleven men in a boat with ropes, but six men were washed overboard and one drowned. Attempts

by a U.S. tugboat to tow *Prasae* off the beach later in the day were also unsuccessful. Boats from *Prasae* also attempted to pull *Prasae* off the beach without success, and a helo off destroyer-minesweeper *Endicott* rescued three Thai sailors after they were washed overboard from one of the pulling boats. *Endicott's* doctor and chief corpsman also went ashore to care for casualties until they could be evacuated.

On 8 January, a Sikorsky H03S1 of Helicopter Utility Squadron TWO (HU-2) embarked on carrier *Valley Forge* maneuvered near *Prasae* when a rogue wave caused the ship to roll. The helicopter's rotors hit the mast, causing the mast to collapse and the helicopter to crash in flames, which then ignited 20mm shells causing more damage to the ship. The crew put the fire out in under 30 minutes. Somewhat miraculously, the helicopter pilot, Lieutenant (junior grade) John W. Thornton, his aircrewman, and a salvage officer, all survived the crash, but another Thai sailor drowned. The Chinese claimed to hit *Prasae* with shore battery fire, but it was actually the helo crash.

Over the next two days the storm intensified. Seawater contaminated the engine oil, causing the engine to die and then freeze. By 10 January, the sailors on *Prasae* were without heat, light, or drinking water as temperatures dropped to minus 16 degrees. On 12 January the medical officer of light cruiser *Manchester* (CL-83) was flown on board, and determined that the conditions were too severe for the crew to remain on board. The same day, a small enemy patrol was driven off by gunfire from the watch.

Once it was determined *Prasae* could not be saved, and the seas made boat transfer too dangerous, the crew of *Prasae* was evacuated by helicopter. An H03S1, flown by enlisted pilot Chief Aviation Structural Mechanic ADC(AP) Duane "Wilbur" Thorin of HU-1, embarked on *Manchester*, rescued 118 crewmen in 40 sorties over a three day period from 12-14

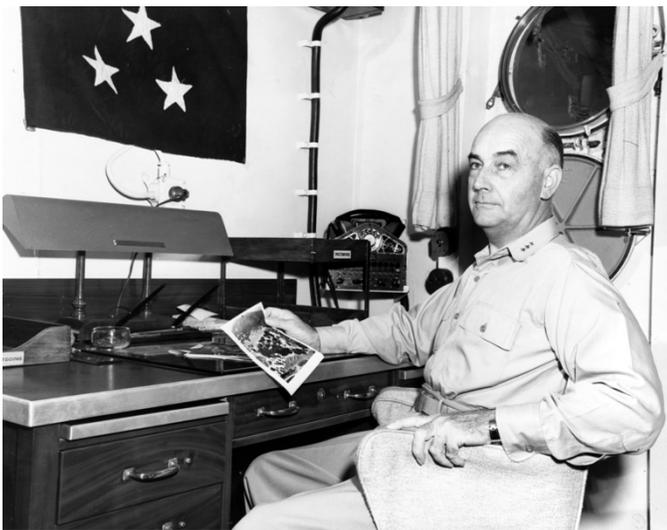
January. (The "(AP)" designated enlisted pilot after the rating, sometime also abbreviated as "NAP.") Thorin's Distinguished Flying Cross citation states he was operating from *Rochester*, which had already left the area, and evacuated 126 men, stating "at great personal risk, he made repeated flights to evacuate injured personnel, furnish food and clothing and to pass salvage lines." The discrepancy in numbers is probably due to round trips by U.S. personnel to assist.

Thorin had enlisted in the Navy in 1939 and became an enlisted pilot, serving as a test pilot for all types of carrier aircraft during World War II. After flying Navy transports for a couple years and serving as an instructor pilot, he transferred to helicopters in 1949. Thorin made over 130 rescues in hostile territory before his helicopter crashed under fire during an attempted rescue in February 1952 and he was captured. He escaped from a POW camp in July 1952 but was recaptured. He was awarded a Silver Star and two more DFCs for his rescues. With his trademark green scarf, he was the inspiration for the fictitious Chief Petty Officer (NAP) Mike Forney in James Michener's book, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, played by Mickey Rooney in the movie adaptation. Thorin was commissioned after the war and served as an analyst at the National Security Agency.

LTJG Thornton survived the crash and continued to fly rescue missions behind enemy lines until he, too, crashed under heavy fire after volunteering for a dangerous rescue mission on 31 March 1951 (for which he was awarded a Navy Cross). He was the first Navy helicopter pilot to be captured during the war and the last POW to be released alive, after the armistice in 1953. Thornton eventually retired from the Navy as a captain.

After the evacuation of her crew, *Prasae* was destroyed by gunfire from U.S. Navy ships on 14 January 1951 before the Chinese could reach her. In October 1951, the U.S. transferred the patrol frigate USS *Gallup* (PF-47) to the Thai Navy and she was renamed *Prasae*. *Gallup* had served in the

Pacific during World War II, before she was transferred to the Soviet Union in August 1945 under the Project Hula lend-lease program via the U.S.-Soviet training program in the Aleutian Islands. Serving in the Soviet Navy as *EK-22*, she arrived too late to participate in Soviet action against Japan at the end of World War II and it took until 1949 for the U.S. to get her back from the Soviets. The second *Prasae* returned to Korea to serve with UN forces and remained in service until 2000 when she became a museum ship in Thailand. (My thanks to Captain Tom Phillips, USN (Ret.) for some of his research on this incident.)



Vice Admiral Arthur D. Struble, USN, Commander, Seventh Fleet in his office aboard USS *Missouri* (BB-63), off Korea, circa October 1950-March 1951. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the U.S. National Archives. (80-G-430078)

Navy Operations Late January 1951

With the emergency situation stabilized in mid-January, Marine squadron VMF-323 debarked *Badoeng Stait* and VMF-214 debarked *Sicily* for Japan and then re-deployed to land bases in South Korea, where much to the Marines' displeasure they were essentially integrated into the 5th Air Force. The two escort carriers then returned to the U.S. Marines on the ground no longer had direct support from their own aircraft, but had to rely on whatever aircraft the 5th Air Force chose to send. The 1st Marine Division was also essentially integrated into the 8th Army and used as just another infantry

division, making any further major amphibious landings impractical.

On 17 January 1951, light carrier *Bataan* with Destroyer Division 72 relieved HMS *Theseus* and screen as CTE 95.11 in the Yellow Sea. *Theseus* and *Bataan* would alternate duty for the next months. Two days later, *Leyte* detached from TF-77 and returned to Japan and then back to the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, having been deployed to the Korean theater since September (after being yanked off a Mediterranean deployment).

On 19 January, the fast transport *Horace A. Bass* (APD-124) had landed elements of Underwater Demolition Team ONE (UDT-1) conducting hydrographic survey on the west coast of South Korea well south of the battle lines when they were ambushed by men in civilian clothes and concealed weapons. Two UDT were killed and five wounded. *Horace A. Bass* departed for the U.S. on 28 January with a Navy Unit Commendation for her UDT work at Inchon, Wonsan and the east coast of North Korea.

On 20 January, the Amphibious Task Force (TF 90), still under the command RADM James H. Doyle, was tasked to lift thousands of enemy prisoners of war and civilian refugees to several offshore islands. On 24 January, the Commander U.S. Pacific Fleet (Admiral Arthur W. Radford), Commander Naval Forces Far East (VADM C. Turner Joy), and Commander U.S. SEVENTH Fleet (VADM Arthur D. Struble) all arrived at Pusan, South Korea, and embarked on RADM Doyle's flagship *Mount McKinley* (AGC-7) for RADM Doyle's change of command with RADM Ingolf N. Kiland as Commander Amphibious Forces Far East (TF 90.) Having commanded the massive amphibious operations during the defense of the Pusan Perimeter, landings at Inchon, landings at Wonsan, and the evacuation of Hungnam, Doyle was awarded a richly-deserved Navy Distinguished Service Medal to go with his Silver Star from Inchon. He retired in 1953 and was advanced to vice admiral due to his World War II

combat service (known as a “tombstone promotion.”)

On 29 January, Task Force 77 commenced what would be its primary mission over the next months, the interdiction of bridges and tunnels in the eastern half of North Korea, including the northeastern area near the Soviet Union. These targets would prove hard to hit with the weapons of the time and even harder to inflict lasting damage. Most would be quickly repaired and were increasingly defended with numerous anti-aircraft weapons, including radar-directed AAA, making the missions increasingly hazardous and increasingly viewed by the pilots as futile. Nevertheless, extraordinary innovation and valor was displayed by Navy carrier pilots in this campaign, which I will cover in more detail in a future H-Gram.

With the Chinese offensive halted, UN forces began a methodical advance back towards the 38th Parallel, aided by a deception operation known as Operation Ascendant, under the command of CTF 95, RADM Allen E. Smith. RADM Smith “borrowed” two attack cargo ships (AKA), two LSTs and two LSMR “Rocket Ships” from the Amphibious Force and sailed in his flagship, the destroyer tender *Dixie* and several gunnery ships to a point on the east coast of Korea, 50 miles behind Chinese lines at Kansong. At 0700 on 30 January, the battleship *Missouri* (BB-63) opened fire, joined by light cruiser *Manchester* and several destroyers in a sustained bombardment. During the day, the minesweepers, landing craft and rocket ships conducted a very realistic feint. On the next morning, the force reappeared and did it all over again. How much this fooled the Chinese is unknown. However, *Dixie* fired 204 rounds, which may constitute the only shore bombardment by a destroyer-tender.

Another diversionary operation took place on the west coast of Korea in the vicinity of Inchon. U.S. heavy cruiser *Saint Paul* (CA-73) was fired on by enemy shore batteries near Inchon, but gunfire

from *Saint Paul*, HMS *Ceylon*, and several destroyers, along with air strikes from HMS *Theseus*, neutralized the artillery batteries. On 6 February, *Missouri* transited around the Korean Peninsula and on 8 February opened fire on targets around Inchon. Two attack cargo ships and an LSD simulated pre-landing operations. A major demonstration by two transport divisions was planned for high tide on 10 February, but was cancelled when the Chinese pulled out of Inchon before being cut off by the 8th Army, which was advancing faster than anticipated toward Seoul.



Crewmen load 16-inch projectiles aboard *Missouri* in preparation for further Korean War bombardment operations. Photo is dated 14 February 1951, a day when *Missouri* was at Inchon, Korea. Note shell carts, used to move the projectiles on the battleship's upper deck. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph. (NH 96784)

The Siege of Wonsan

Throughout January, the minesweeper force was busy clearing lanes all along the east coast of Korea for use by ships to bombard enemy positions. The mine force had grown to 13 wooden-hulled AMS, but only two of the larger AM (after *Pirate* (AM-275) and *Pledge* (AM-277) had been sunk at Wonsan in October). The work continued to be extremely dangerous as the force worked its way northward for the impending blockade of Wonsan.

On 2 February 1951, minesweeper USS *Partridge* (AMS-31) was clearing a channel for naval gunfire support ships off Sokcho, just north of the 38th Parallel. A mine popped up from behind the minesweeper ahead of *Partridge*. With no time to evade, *Partridge* struck the mine and quickly sank in less than ten minutes. Eight crewmen were killed, including the Commanding Officer Lieutenant (junior grade) Boyers "Morgan" Clark, Jr. Two Japanese mess boys were also killed and six crewmen were wounded of the twenty survivors. Engineman 1/C William D. Haines and Yeoman 3/C Robert E. Shewmaker were each awarded Silver Stars for their heroic efforts to save other crewmen during the sinking. *Partridge* was the fourth U.S. minesweeper sunk in the Korean War, of seven total (one South Korean and two Japanese contract minesweepers). (Of note, junior officer William McGonagle had served as assistant engineering officer on *Partridge* until he transferred to *Kite* (AMS-22) as executive officer. McGonagle would be awarded a Medal of Honor in command of intelligence collection ship USS *Liberty* (AGTR-5) when she was attacked and severely damaged by Israeli aircraft and torpedo boats in June 1967.)

On 16 February 1951, UN naval forces commenced a blockade of the North Korean port of Wonsan (also known as the "Siege of Wonsan.") Lasting 861 days until the armistice in 1953, this was the longest naval blockade in modern history. Besides being a major port on the east coast of North Korea, Wonsan was also a logistics chokepoint for rail and road networks in eastern North Korea. Besides closing the port to outside reinforcement, UN forces commenced near daily gunfire missions on 17 February against the shore logistics hub, causing heavy damage. Numerous U.S. ships would be hit by shore battery fire in constant duels over the next three years, but none would be sunk. However, several more U.S. ships more would be badly damaged by mines.

On 19 February 1951, destroyer USS *Ozbourne* (DD-846) took two direct hits and several near

misses from enemy shore batteries near Wonsan, North Korea. Despite the hits, *Ozbourne* remained on the firing line and sent her whaleboat 14 miles into a minefield to rescue a downed pilot from carrier *Valley Forge*. The boat officer was awarded a Bronze Star with Combat V. (*Ozbourne* was again hit by shore battery fire off Vietnam in March and December 1967 but continued her mission each time.)

On 24 February, Republic of Korea Marines captured the undefended island of Sindo-Ri in Wonsan, with the assistance of two U.S. destroyers and two patrol frigates.

The Korean War will continue in future H-Grams.

Sources include: *Such Men as These: The Story of the Navy Pilots Who Flew the Deadly Skies Over Korea*, by David Sears: Da Capo Press, 2010. *Attack from the Sky: Naval Air Operations in the Korean War*, by Richard C. Knott: Naval Historical Center, 2002. *United States Naval Aviation, 1910-2010, Vol. I*, chronology by Mark L. Evans and Roy A. Grossnick, Naval History and Heritage Command, 2015. "Naval Battles of the Korean War," by Edward J. Marolda, at history.navy.mil. *History of United States Naval Operations: Korea*, by James A. Field: U.S. Navy History Division, 1962. "Thai Naval Operations in the Korean War" at GlobalSecurity.org